

THE DREAM
OF
FAIR WOMEN

HENRY WILLIAMSON



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THE DREAM OF FAIR WOMEN

THE DREAM OF FAIR WOMEN

BY
HENRY WILLIAMSON
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“The poor dear was young, and ’ow should the young
know what us old ’uns know, after suffering?”

Philosophy of Martha

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE

1924

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PZ 3
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Printed in the United States of America

OCT - 2 '24
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TO MY FRIEND
J. D. BERESFORD

The characters in this book with one exception are imagined. The exception is the character called Peter White. The original of the portrait, an adolescent who wrote *A Document in Hysteria*, which is reproduced here practically as it was written in 1919 when it came into my hands, ceased to be a few hours after it was composed.

H. W.

Skirr Cottage,
27th Nov., 1923.

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PART I
THE WEAVER AND THE FLAX

*. . . who sighs
Amid this starless waste of woe,
To find a pathway . . .*

THE DREAM OF FAIR WOMEN

CHAPTER I

AT THE NIGHTCROW INN

ONE Friday evening towards the end of May, in the year 1919, a one-eyed labourer known as Brownie in the North Devon hamlet of Brakspears St. Flammea was sitting before a tankard of ale, with his elbows on the long oak table of the Nightcrow Inn. He was a thin man, in a worn black coat splashed with mortar and without a collar, wearing a decayed hat with the brim turned down and pulled so low over his eye that the black moustache seemed to be growing from a circle of gloom. For half-an-hour he had been talking about a lady he had met that evening, and telling his companions what she had said about a young gentleman living alone in a cottage near the hamlet.

Other men were seated on wooden benches round the polished oak table, relaxing after the day's work in the fields. Talk had stopped while the landlord lit the paraffin lamp and hung it on the bent nail beside the wall clock. The low flame misted the glass, but slowly and evenly the blur rolled down the globe, leaving it clear and bright. A man called Tom Fitchey

asked for another quart by rattling the pewter pot on the table. It was pay-day, and many shillings were in his pocket. The landlord came back from the barrel room with the ale, and placing it before Tom, took the shilling with a word of thanks, and turned up the wick of the lamp.

“Have a drink, Tagur, mideal,” said Brownie in a voice hoarse as a crow’s, but with the low crooning tone of a wood pigeon’s notes. The man addressed as Tiger was sitting beside him.

At the invitation of his friend he drank a draught of ale. Earlier in the evening the two had been down the cliff-paths on the north side of the headland, collecting the eggs of herring gulls.

“Her were a bootiful maid, her were,” said Brownie, reflectively, “and I could have sworn her were a vixen, asleep in the zin.”

Some time later, when the Nightcrow Inn was filled with men and dogs, the young gentleman mentioned so frequently by Brownie opened the door and stepped from starlit darkness into an atmosphere of growling talk, spitting, rank tobacco smoke, and banged pewter pots, through which glowered the orange-sooty flame of the paraffin lamp. He entered so quietly that Muggy the hamlet wit, sitting in his usual corner-seat under the wall-clock, did not notice that the subject of his story was in the bar. Muggy raised his voice almost to a shout, so that all might hear the joke.

“That’s as true as I’m sitting here. The young lady says to me, when I says to her that the gennulmun were living by himself in Rats’ Castle, ‘Well, Muggy,’ her says, ‘what be the gennulmun’s name—Lord Tornsox?’ ”

“Ho, ho, ho!” laughed Brownie, “Mis’r Meddlesome be a praper Lord Tornsox—worse nor I be.”

The young man at the door hesitated, then said gaily, “Evening, Brownie!”

“Gorbrugge!” gasped Brownie, “if Mis’r Meddlesome bant hereabouts!”

A chorus of *Evenun, zur!* came through the tobacco mist. The landlord standing near touched with his pipe stem what looked like an enormous shiny horse-chestnut above his eyes, for his bald head was a sun-burnt brown.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Maddison, zur,” cried old Muggy from his corner; “no offence intended, zur. I beg your pardon, Mr. Maddison.”

Old Muggy had been round the world; no man in the parish was more polite.

“I was just repeating, sir, what a lady visitor to Croyde zaid to me this morning when I took the lady a telegram. Her wanted to know, zur, where you lived, and I told her Rats’ Castle!”

Shouts of laughter bestirred the air. Silence was instant, for Muggy had held up his hand. From the corner his face, shiny like an old apple, smiled beyond the smoke. He wore an old tweed fishing cap, a black shirt, a crumpled collar and a frayed tartan tie knotted as though it was a bootlace.

“‘And what be his occupation, Muggy?’ her zays. ‘Looking after sick birds and beasts of the fields, miss,’ I zays, ‘and also study-ing of many books.’”

“‘A pity he hasn’t studied his face in the glass, Muggy!’ her says; beggin’ your pardon, Mr. Maddison.”

“Ho, ho, ho!” bellowed Brownie, full of ale, “dang

me if her haven't got sharp eyes, Mis'r Meddlesome, even if you haven't got a sharp razor, midea!"

The Nightcrow Inn was filled with the loudest laughter. In the space of the door leading to the barrel room appeared the three faces of the landlord's wife and daughters. About the tenant of Rats' Castle they were most curious. He stood with his back to the door, tall and smiling. He had brown hair and a beard of lighter hue, and was dressed only in a faded khaki shirt, flannel trousers torn by thorns and brambles, and old shoes. Clasped in his right hand was a staff of hazel, with a fork at its top end.

"What be you drinking, zur?" asked the landlord of the Nightcrow Inn.

"A quart of ale, please."

"Thank ee, zur, you'm welcome," floated the answer as the short plump man went through the low doorway to the barrel room.

"Mis'r Meddlesome, I hope you aren't o-ffended, zur?" said Brownie in his hoarse, soft, croodling voice.

His single eye, very gentle, regarded him with mournful affection. The answer of the young man was to toss over his tobacco pouch, with a reassuring "Of course not, Brownie."

Brownie finished his third quart, banged the pot, and standing crookedly between bench and table raised his arm and began to sing—a thing he did when he had swallowed three quarts.

*"Ruddle-coloured din,
Be the best colour under th' zin,"*

he croaked.

Many faces turned to look at the young gennulmun,

who wondered why they were looking so knowingly at him.

“You see, zur,” cried Muggy from his corner, “our parents had a zaying that ‘Mousey-colour din, or hair, be the best colour under the zin, or sun,’ and Brownie have altered the colour of the hair in the saying, do you see, sir?”

Again they laughed, and he looked puzzled. Brownie leaned anxiously over the table, beckoned mysteriously with a broken-nailed finger, and stared earnestly at him. He went near him.

“Mis’r Meddlesome,” his whisper was almost a shout, breathed warmly into his listener’s ear, “Mis’r Meddlesome, zur, don’t ee be o-ffended at what I be going to tell ee, will ee, now?”

The young man shook his head, and the black moustache tickled his ear. An argument about the slackness of the Parish Council in repairing roads had been started by two yeomen farmers, and many loud voices were speaking at once.

“Now, midear, listen on what Brownie be a-going to tell ee. It be something peculiar. Do ee know Corpsnout? ’Twas there I saw her. Ruddle vixen. Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!”

Brownie had fallen back upon the bench, tilted his head, and given forth a noise. His mouth opened wide and he chuckled to himself at nearly the top of his voice. He stopped, stared earnestly, beckoned once more, craned over and croaked, “Her spoke to me confirmationally when I told her I knowed ee fairish well—begging your pardon, zur.”

“Your ale,” said the landlord of the Nightcrow Inn, behind him. He took the swilling pewter pot, shouted, “Good health” to him, and drank deeply.

“Mis’r Meddlesome, zur,” beckoned Brownie, who had been regarding dismally the tilting of the mug, “Ee weren’t o-ffended at what I did tell ee, were ee now?”

“I am very interested, Brownie.”

Brownie made a cawing whisper through his hands. “Now, I saw the ruddle vixen on Corpsnout northside this evening with Tagur, and her said to me confirmationally her wanted to meet ee, midear!”

Brownie sat down, and tried many times to wink his glass eye at William, then seeing that the gennulmun was not heeding him, he began to sing. William was lost in a reverie, the noise and movement faded out, like green fields when a cloud covers the sun. He had forgotten Brownie and his information; it had made no impression on his mind. The look on his face in repose was familiar to many of the drinkers in the Nightcrow Inn. He seemed to be excited by his thoughts. His eyes became animated, as he stared unseeing past the wall-clock. He came only once a week to the village to buy the simplest and cheapest foods; why he chose to live in a dilapidated cottage so far from the ways of men, whether he had parents or wife, no one in the hamlet knew. Many had seen him by day on the hills, usually lying on his back with his face to the sky. He avoided most men, but whenever he met them he was courteous and had a cheery word for them, by which invariable behavior they declared him to be a “praper gennulmun,” although he was friendless and obviously poor.

The dominant traits in his mind being increased by drink, Brownie’s altruistic desires began to assert themselves, and unmasked he was bestowing upon the as-

sembled company the generosity of a song. He beat a funereal time with his empty tankard.

“*Zeagull, zeagull,
Vly away over th’ foam,
And tell-on my daddy Ah’m waiting to hear
When, O when, he be a-cumin’ home!
Zeagull, zeagull,
What’s that Ah hear you t’ say?
That stame-ship be foundered
And all hands be droon-ded—
O zeagull! O-O-O-O!*”

And the sloghorn of the stame-ship was blowin’ for two months in Combe Martin Bay—Yaas!”

The chanty ended in Brownie shouting. The listeners roared with laughter, and some of the younger men, who had served in the Army, cheered and cried for more. Brownie’s pronunciation of the words *steamship* and *foghorn* always caused merriment. The singer swayed backwards and forwards on his legs and looked solemnly at them, his moustache like the wings of a swift inverted, then banged his tankard on the table and stretching across to the gennulmun, bawled, “Yaas! Ruddle vixen, Mis’r Missom, d’ee hear? Her said her were a-wondering who ee were, her did! Nice li’l maid for ee! You’m a-right, midear, proper li’l maid her be. Her hair be bootiful and red, like a ruddle pool in th’ roadway after rain. I thought as how her were a vixen at first, lying in th’ gorse! Just right for to make ee happy, midear. Give ee twenty babies, midear, like my missus gave me. Yaas!”

Brownie guffawed and banged the quart mug; the

landlord cried, "Not so much noise, chaps, please!" and came forward to William.

"Beggin your pardon, zur," he whispered, "but have you zeen anthing lately of Jack o' Rags?"

"I saw him this afternoon. He's moving out of the mine into the shed, I believe, now that it is warmer. Two days ago he left some gulls' eggs on my doorstep. He often leaves rabbits, and bundles of drift-wood. I believe he thinks I'm some sort of a god to be propitiated by offerings!"

The landlord nodded as though he quite comprehended.

"Of course, it may be unusual, zur, but I can quite understand. For I reads a bit myself. Oh, yes, I'm a master reader. All of the best and most interesting Sunday papers I reads—the *News of the World*, *Lloyds*, and *The People*.* I reckon I could be a writer misself, I've learn't so much by studying them papers, only I haven't the eddication or the jennus."

"But genius, or even education, I should imagine, might handicap you for work on those papers. It would be such a hindrance!" suggested the other, smiling. The landlord looked scared as though by the difficult and dark ways into which the conversation was taking him, but he made a valiant attempt to follow, with the result that the talk was somewhat laboured and disconnected.

"That's what I be telling my missus, Mister Madd'-zun, I zays, may be peculiar, with his beard—beggin' your pardon, zur."

"Oh, quite!"

* These papers, so popular with the semi-educated people, do their best to rival one another in display of accounts of murders, divorces, crimes, etc. Naturally they have the largest sales in town and country alike.—H. W.

“He may be peculiar, I says, with his beard, and his animals and living in Rats’ Castle all alone, but I reckons there be something to it! ‘Him so good looking,’ her replies, ‘what for do he wear a beard? No young lady would look at un!’ ‘P’raps he doan’t like young ladies,’ I says, ‘but animals instead.’ ‘It isn’t natural, Albert,’ she says, ‘for a young gennulmun not to like young maids. He looks that melancholy at times, what comes of being too much by himself!’ What be that Broonie was telling you on?” The landlord of the Nightcrow Inn spoke in a low and confidential voice, and changed the conversation with relief and with a suggestion of apology in its tone, as though timorous of a rebuff.

“He was speaking about a ruddle vixen that he saw upon the headland. It turned out to be a girl. I haven’t yet quite understood his remarks.”

“Well, zur, it be after this way. Broonie has been full of it all the evening. Broonie and Tiger went on the headland after seabird’s eggs. The two were going to the rocks below down the slope, when Broonie stopped and pointed to a ruddle patch in the furze bushes——”

“Yaas!” broke in the voice of the sitting spectator, “I stoppit an pointed: ‘Looksee,’ I says, ‘Looksee, now, Tagur, midear, did ee ever see before vixen slaeping in th’ sun?’ That’s as true as I’m a God-fearing man, Mis’r Meddlesome. ‘Wish I’d a gun,’ zays Tiger, when up looks the vixen and zays, plain as a strawberry, ‘O, do ee?’ her says, lofty as you please. A most bootiful young lady her were. Us got into converzation wi her. Her weren’t proud, not likely! ‘And where be th’ young gennulmun with a beard?’ her asks me, confirmationally. ‘And he had some bootiful

spannuls. Tell him I would like a pup from him,' her says. Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho."

Brownie rolled sideways in merriment.

Two more labourers entered, acknowledging respectfully the gennulmun's greeting. The landlord came back, balancing the three quart pots, and shouting for his daughter to lend a hand. A strapping girl with a long yellow plait tossed over her shoulder came in answer to his call, and thenceforward till closing time she was refilling mugs and winding up the tin-horned gramophone behind the bar in response to shouts of "another chewne, mideal." Muggy, the recognised wag of the hamlet of Brakspears St. Flammea, began to recount a joke about Gladstone at the top of his voice, while The Tiger and the other whist players under the lamp continued with their card-playing and bel-lowed criticism of their partners' mistakes. Several men began playing rings for quarts; Brownie was snoring under his hat, while his ancient lurcher dog snored by the pipe-stove. The hands of the wall-clock crept nearer to the hour of departure, and again he heard the smoothly thick tones of the landlord beside him.

"Beggin' your pardon, zur, but th' young lady be living at Cryde Bay, across the Corpsnout Headland, ye know. Hers a married lady called Mrs. Fairfax."

The young man drank some more ale. The vigour of the home brew was warming, and he made a resolution to visit the Nightcrow several times a week instead of once. He would be able to dispel loneliness by coming here—but he would not, however; for social habits, even those of the remotest seaboard, were not for him. Nothing must interfere with his soaring thought: not even a weak craving for the company

of simple, sincere men. The warmth of the ale communicated itself to his head, and he brought from his pocket a soiled book and glanced at the open page. The smoke, the heat, the noise, all these floated away; until with almost the effect of a physical blow the landlord's voice obtruded:

" . . . So there be some talk o' watchers going forth at night. Two more ewes were worritted last night over Brakspear Down. Muggy here, he reckons there be a dog worritting th' shaep. You've seen nothing of a slinketty mongrel, have ee now zur?"

"No."

"I were only wondering," informed the landlord, "because you'm about walking a good lot. Funny thing, now, old Voley th' shepherd do zay that he has found some sort of tracks, only the ground be too hard to take a likeness. Something must be done, reckons. There be nigh on a zgore of lambs and ewes worritted this season! All their heads be torn tarrible!"

"Perhaps it is the work of several dogs. Sheep worrying is a stealthy business, you know. Cases are on record, I believe, where actually sheep dogs have slunk away at night and torn lambs, returning in darkness. Traps have been set by the shepherds, but the dogs by day have observed their location and so avoided them."

The landlord looked frightened. "Zome so zay it be a ghostie, zur. Do ee credit ghosties, now? A mortal number of men were hanged in this district less than a hundred years ago. Muggy, now, he do say that their ghosties be back in revenge!"

"It be gone ten, feyther," interrupted his daughter.

"Drink up, chaps!" cried the landlord, in fear of the

constable who every evening was known to be standing outside in the lane. "Come on, boys. Ten o'clock."

Hilariously yet swiftly they got on their legs and clumped to the door. Brownie and his dog heaved past the gennulmun, Brownie crying "Gude-night midear, gude-night," his old lurcher coming to lick his hand. One by one they crowded to the doorway, while carrying on their growling arguments. He followed the last labourer, bidding good-night to the landlord and thanking him for the gift of two dead mice, then passed into the shuffling crowd outside.

The lane led westwards to Falcon Goyal and the sea. As he went gaily in the keen air he felt an exultation at the thought of his free life. He joyed in the night beauty. Like a gold curlew's bill, the new moon curved in a violet sky, the simmering roar of the tide grew suddenly, and the goyal was before him. He quitted the cart track and followed a path through gorse and rising brake fern to the cove below. His way was lit by a globe of silver, Venus reluming the pale evening vapours over the sea. By his side the goyal stream murmured round the stones and its bubbles chimed in the little pools, melodic with the lone rattle of an evejar and the booming of dor-beetles. Rabbits fled from quiet nibbling at his swift descent, and somewhere a roosting bird twitted a drowsy alarm.

CHAPTER II

RATS' CASTLE

HE stood for awhile near his cottage, tranced with a reverie of the stars shining faintly in the waterpools of the rill, and the wind among the blackthorns. This earth beauty was but a medium by which he might reach the realm of dream. He sighed as he took one last look at the surge white and gleaming in the cove, and opened the door. Three floppy warm things awakened from sleep nosed joyfully their god's ankles, and Grannie Gordangle, an ancient daw perched upon the back of a chair, croaked softly.

"Down, Tim Tatters! Down, Billjohn! Down, Hereward!" he ordered the puppies, and lit a candle. The room was small, without carpet or mat; there was a wooden table, a broken armchair, and a soap-box. By the solitary illumination he perceived Becky and Pie the kittens on the bookshelf, and Isaak the otter cub curled up in a corner with the milk bottle still held between its paws. He could not see Diogenes the carrion crow but discovered Oswald the broken-winged seagull in the rusty oven. Diogenes the carrion crow was probably upstairs with his cousins Jerry the jay, and Moony Matthew the owlet. It was necessary to remove Becky and Pie from their retreat on the bookshelf, since he wished to read before going to bed. The volumes had once been tidily arranged on the

shelf, but after the custom of books they soon leant on one another, incapable of self-support. There were the volumes of Richard Jeffries—*The Amateur Poacher, Bevis, Field and Hedgerow, Amaryllis at the Fair, The Pageant of Summer*, and *The Dewy Morn*; there were books by Thomas Hardy and Joseph Conrad, and John Masefield's *Gallipoli*; beside these there were the poets, Thompson, Keats, Blake, Shelley, and a living poet named de la Mare, whose verses he had come upon in a shell hole—sodden, yellow, and rat-gnawn, but how the thoughts of a brother-man had consoled him!

Now he took a volume of Blake, and three lines he read, sufficient for a foothold from which his mind might spring into space where was neither sound nor form nor colour, where like a White Bird in a shining void it spread its wings and was free. In the vivid light he saw quicker than conscious thought how little and false were the main ideals of mankind. He saw the earth as something small and swung in space, something which was there for a while only. He saw mankind a smudge on the surface of the earth, a smudge which had strayed from the control of the impulse which swung from the shining void but which was striving desperately to control it once again. This vision, which came to him in an instant of time, caused a look of intense and eager excitement in his eyes. It passed, and under its influence he paced the room, speaking to an invisible listener.

“Once there were crowds of cheering men in London and New York, in Paris, in Rome, and in Vienna; and following the cheering was joylessness of nations subdued and earnest, all praying to the same God, all believing in their national righteousness; and in

spite of the praying men continued to die and to be maimed—both were reliefs from the desolation and the despair of war. In that war my puny body suffered and sweated and was tempted to destroy itself, but something extra in my spirit, in common with a million others, made me keep on, though I was ill-made to bear with fortitude physical pain and bodily stress.”

He was an unremarkable figure, with his high shoulders on which was set a thin neck supporting a small head covered with hair tangled and unkempt. The front teeth of his upper jaw, while not projecting, completely covered the front teeth of the lower jaw, and the mouth was wide. A commonplace face, in repose, that would not be looked at twice, unless one saw the eyes, a singular and beautiful feature. As he turned away from the book they caught and held the rambling light of the candle, and smouldered in the gloom of the kitchen. They were upbrimming with a deep warm brown, mysterious, translucent, and tender.

“O Great Spirit of Earth,” he cried in agitation. “No man wanted to die, yet the bones of the slain girdle the earth, and the footsteps of women follow in pride and grief and prayer to the wilderness where they lie. And so men struggled in ancient Greece and Babylon, in Assyria and Egypt—in all the civilizations that have been. The sand hides the skulls of their priests, and hawks nest in the walls of the temples not yet fallen. Their Gods are dead, and today all nations pray to a God; yet these things remain. Yet I should fight again if our nation were threatened; and so would some other young man like me by the Mediterranean, by the Pacific, by the Rhine. But in my soul I know it to be wrong, for I have floated in the shining void of the Great Earth Spirit. I will destroy the false

ideals of mankind, the false deity, and when I am stronger I will make all men hear my voice!"

He went to the cobwebbed window to watch the sinking of the moon with the evestars into the western ocean.

"It is awfully lonely," he sighed, another mood passing over him, "but I cannot turn aside from the way I must walk. I must wait till I get power to express my vision. How many more years in Rats' Castle? Will my army gratuity last? My food only costs about seven shillings a week—I must be more economical, and buy no more meat—I shall have to eat rabbits, hedgehogs, and fish only. Do you think I am mad, or that I have delusions? No, I am just an ordinary chap with a mind that is keener than most. People will not heed the delusionists nowadays. O Hereward, my dear, what a weird little yowl! No, I won't have the three of you clawing my trousers. Down, little puppy dogs, down! Now, don't lie on your backs as though I were a bullying swine. And don't lick my face, please, I'm not a plate. Lie on your proper bed—that pair of trousers over there. Billjohn, my dear, faithful old Billjohn—heavens, I'm getting sloppy and sentimental over this three-months-old pup. Faithful old Billjohn, indeed!"

Habitually he talked to his birds and animals, as if they understood what he said. He sat at the open door beside the puppies, on the cold stone floor, and taking a book out of his pocket opened it at a remembered page, read a thought that inspired him whenever he felt acutely sad and lonely.

How willingly I would strew the paths of all with flowers; how beautiful a delight to make the world joyous! The song should never be silent, the dance never still, the laugh should sound like water which runs for ever.

“How beautiful a delight to make the world joyous!” he repeated in a rapture, staring at a star burning above the high valleyside. A wave crashed on the dark beach, another boomed in the seal cavern at the cove’s mouth. He stood up and leaned against the doorpost, staring into the darkness for several minutes. When he closed the door behind him he felt tired.

Tim Tatters, Billjohn and Hereward were lying in the corner upon the cast pair of trousers. He knelt down to wish them good-night, and they rolled over on their backs and struck bashfully at the god’s face with their paws, at the same time trying to wet his nose with their tongues. He patted them, but as this produced signs of canine giggling he bade them gruffly to lie down; the gruffness caused them to beat an agonized tattoo with their tails upon the old trousers, so that a little cloud of dust arose and made the god sneeze: and they sprang up and in an ecstasy licked his ears.

Becky and Pie, the kittens, were purring upon the only armchair in the room, an affair with three and a half legs and most of its spiral springs burst from an underneath that shed each time one sat on it a fluttering of horse-hairs, feathers, dead moths and mice-gnawn fragments of newspapers. His arrival at Brakspears St. Flammea in a tottery jingle three months previously had coincided with the end of a village

auction, and this armchair was the only article that remained unsold. Indeed, the only offer elicited by the hyperboles of the auctioneer had been a bid of one shilling sixpence three-farthings: he sold the thing by private treaty for half-a-guinea to William, who in the kindness of his heart had paid a stumbling Brownie five shillings to carry it with his bag down to the cottage. Several times he had thought of throwing it into the sea, but he knew he would not be able to buy another. However, it was useful as a bed for the kittens and as a musical treat for the puppies who constantly worried the disembowelled springs and so created a not unpleasant harmony.

Pie was a black-and-white kitten, very tiny and gentle, with narrow ears upstanding like black and withered mistletoe leaves. He had been born in a hollow tree, and was still half wild. Brownie's wife had given it to him to keep away rats and mice. As Pie's size after six months of life was between that of a mole and a stoat, it was perhaps understandable that nothing larger than a wood-louse had been captured. Becky was a yellow-and-plum coloured female kitten, very affectionate and unselfish, who spent half her life in nursing the harumscarum Pie and washing its fur. Pie, he often thought, was Beck's dolly, satisfying her immature maternal cravings. When, however, the dolly refused her tender offices with spits and splutters she would endeavour to nurse the puppies. These humourists rolled her over and over and pranced around her, begging her to run away and be chased. Resenting this, Becky came sorrowfully to her amused master and craved sympathy in the form of goat's milk.

He bade good-night to his companions, lifted the latch of the door hiding the stairs, and went to his

bedroom, where on a rusty bed was heaped a pile of bracken on which two brown Army blankets were spread. The walls were bare of shelf or picture. There was a wooden washstand, with pitcher and basin. Burnt ends of rush-lights stuck in a bottle on the washstand. In one corner of the room was an old khaki field-valise, with *W. Maddison, Reserve Cavalry*, printed thereon in letters of cracked white paint. As he had conjectured, Diogenes the crow was on the rail of the bed with Jerry. The candlelight showed them hunched and sleepy-eyed: they shivered their wings and demanded food, Diogenes (whose proper roost was in a small tub outside) with hoarse gabbling, and Jerry the jay screaming his hunger.

"It's not breakfast time yet," said their host.

"Where's Moony Mat?"

He whistled, until on soundless wings a snowy apparition glided through the window, and perched with solemn stare upon his shoulder. It had one leg, for William had found it in a gin, and amputated the fractured limb at the knee. It was about ten inches high, with a white downy breast and eyes jetty like cherries. An Elizabethan ruff outlined its face, featherlets of pale gold and ash and brown forming the outline of a heart. He gave it the dead mice saved for him by the landlord of the Nightcrow Inn. Moony Matthew seized the first in its beak, tossed it gracefully, caught it by the head, and swallowed till only the tail remained. This was rolled appreciatively in its mouth before it was swallowed. The second was made to vanish in the same manner, after which, with a bubbling cry Moony Matthew spread its beautiful wings and floated into the dusky summer night.

When he was undressed he peered through the small

open window to regard the night's mystery. Already Venus was quenched in the waters that shook in a wan stream of gold up to the dipping moon. A bat passed erratically near his head, taking the midges that thronged the sparrow-tunnelled fringe of thatch. Movement on the shingle and a dark blur by the phosphoric surge made him stare intently; but it was only Jack o' Rags, his zany friend, wandering about after his crazy fashion. Then opening the blankets he got into bed and blew out the candle, feeling too tired to read. The absolute darkness had hardly dissipated and shown vaguely the limewashed walls when a pattering of feet on the stairs indicated the arrival of the puppies. They came eagerly and stood on hind legs by the bed, entreating his adored companionship. This was their invariable method—to wait before coming up till he was in bed and, therefore, disinclined to get out and beat their ribs; they implored so humbly permission to be near him that he lifted them up and hurled them at the bottom of the bed, where on his ankles and each other they settled down with deep sighs to slumber. Soon afterwards a dainty flutter of feet on the dry dusty floorboards announced the kittens, who with easy leap and timid steps reached his neck and insinuated their lithe bodies under the blanket and into the hollow of his back, whence came their contented purring. Moths brushed eerily his head with feathery wings, rats squeaked and galloped in the thick walls, beetles emerged from wainscot cracks for their nocturnal creepings, mice scampered, the stream sang its wander song: to the forsaken music of the sea he drowsily listened, and soon sank away into a sweet slumber.

A trickle of happiness was falling in the white room

when next morning he awoke. Two swallows were perched near their mudded nest on one of the ceiling beams. Near the wall and on the same beam was Moony Matthew, solemn and reposing. Jerry the jay stood on the pillow and was searching industriously his master's hair. Observing the stir of awakening, Jerry opened his bill, raised his crest, expanded and contracted the irises of his eyes, and screamed for food. Diogenes was not in the room.

He leapt out of bed and put on a pair of shoes. The kittens stretched themselves, and Hereward, Billjohn and Tim Tatters yawned. As they closed their mouths they yowled plaintively.

"Get up, you lazy boys," cried their nude master, seizing the blankets and carrying them down the creaking stairs. Spiders darted away at the thuds of descent.

The puppies rushed headlong after him, trying to pull the blankets away. In the lower room he was greeted by Grannie Gordangle, Isaak and Oswald, the latter making raucous noises as he dragged a wing. Isaak moved swiftly over the stone floor, and turned nervously with a sweep of its brown rudder. He picked up the cub and it stared for a moment at him. Its head was wide and flat, its ears flush with its fur, the eyes small and beady and dark. Isaak struggled after its brief inspection, pushing away with its webbed pads and shaking its long whiskers. He placed it on the floor, and went outside into the light.

The morning was fresh, for the sun had not yet breasted the hill. He flapped his blankets, just as the three puppies rushed out of the cottage with the old pair of trousers. They rolled over, growling and kicking, eager to air their own bed after the fashion of the god. He flung the blankets on a bush of whitethorn

and ran to the sea verge. Here the wavelets lapped a beach of broken shells with a sound of bells innumerable and elfin and drowned long since. Quickly his shoes fell off. His skin was a golden-brown. Pausing only to shout to the puppies, he waded out and plunged under water, then swam to the cove's widening, followed by Isaak, who dived and splashed around him. The agonized barks of Billjohn, Hereward and Tim Tatters on shore awoke echoes in the cliffs that towered above the green water, and a score of daws glided from hereditary ledges with sharp ejaculations. He turned on his back and rested, regarding the sable flock circling against a sky of azure. Just at that moment the sun bent its first ray over the far hillcrest, rendering frailly transparent the wing-texture of two gulls drifting above him. The little trees of the hill line shrank into a golden flame, which permitted his gaze but a brief moment.

"Coming, boys," shouted William, then put his head under water and commenced to beat along with the crawl-stroke. This was exhausting work, and soon he ceased and swam in on his side, the beady eyes in the bewhiskered mask of Isaak often near his own, for the cub loved him.

"Here I am, my faithfuls," he said to the prancing boys as he emerged dripping and flushed. They sprang up to their god, they grovelled before him, they entangled themselves round his feet, they picked up dried seaweed and killed a dozen imaginary milkydashels* for him, but the only reward from their god was, "Shut up, you silly asses," which pleased them tremendously.

* On chasing a rabbit for the first time, the spaniels, who had been weaned on goatsmilk, saw only its white scut, or tail, as the terrified beast dashed away.

Mrs. Large and Mrs. Larger, the goats, were visited when he had put on shirt and flannel trousers, and their chalkwhite milk transferred to a little pail sand-scoured and burnished. This operation was hindered continually by Tim Tatters, the rowdy leader of the trio, who attempted alternately to pull the beard of Mrs. Large and to drink the milk taken from Mrs. Larger. Skilfully he dodged the blows of the playful god while Hereward and Billjohn from a secure distance yapped encouragement. He was not agile enough to avoid the ill-humour of Mrs. Large, however, and after a butt in the ribs fled tail-down and yelping, pursued by the other two, who tried to console him by tugging his floppy ears in opposite directions. A snarly fight ensued, which was terminated by a rush for home lest Oswald, Isaak, Becky, Grannie, Pie, Jerry and Diogenes should eat all the breakfast.

He made a fire of furze roots and boiled a kettle. A continuous uproar came from his subjects.

"OUTSIDE," yelled the god, and all except Grannie, a privileged ancient, made for the door. They returned immediately, and recommenced their requests for breakfast. He went to the pantry and took from the shelf, littered with plaster and defunct cockroaches, a huge pot. In this was his food, consisting of stale crusts of bread, rabbits, ox bones, hedgehogs, laver seaweed, potatoes and fish, all boiled up together. Into a large dish he poured the cold stew; there was a commingling of wings, heads, and feet, and noises of sucking, munching, cracking and pecking. The birds squawked, the cats hissed and spat and boxed with their paws, the dogs growled and bristled to each other, the otter cub ate unmolested. When they had finished, William ate his own breakfast.

After the meal he cleaned his teeth with a green willow stick, one end of which had been frayed by beating on a stone. Then he went on the beach, and lying on his back looked up at the sky through his hands till he felt himself tenuous and impersonal as the blue space over him. He felt a peace, a concordance with all things.

The strand was deep with brittle shells, all empty and quiet. There were whole shells among the shillets and fragments and coloured splinters—broad sunset shells, washed with the western summer sky-hues; there were tiger scallops, and pod razors; little milky arcs, and wentletraps like the conical hats of mediæval women; the pelican's foot and the tiny reddish pheasant shells; tusk shells—horns for fairy-winding—and the cowries, wherein murmured a perpetual sea-chafing; pearl-like tellins and lovely fragile bubble shells. There were caps of liberty—like those worn with the tricolour, but shaped before man tipped his arrows with flint. There were turret shells, and the lime-built house of the rare violet snail. Spring tides had left an irregular brown riband at the top of the beach near the broken lumps of grassy earth, made of driftwood bored by worm and barnacle, the bark of pine spars from distant shipyards, grey gull-feathers and the blue and scarlet claws of the fiddler crab, rusty tins and dried corpses of the spined sea-urchin.

Nearly every morning he had lain here in the sun, while the calm wavelets rang the shells, and the rills last bubbly run passed him to the sea. There were elvers under the slaty stones, and many hours he had spent in trying to catch them as they wriggled away when their hiding places were lifted. It was a simple joy to watch them, like the pleasure of finding strange

wildflowers on the hillside. For he was a convalescent after the consumption of spirit which had ravaged extreme youth during the days of war, when nothing assumed definite form in the hectic mists hiding a world of painted quicksands ever shifting and changing, and ever sucking down human life. On these painted quicksands he had seen only the crude colours of ephemeral excitement, where the standards and codes of rational and matured men were meaningless, for they were applicable only to the firm ground of reality. With many another, he had been blown by every wind, a feather on the shore of the world, with but one thing constant in his mind, an intense yearning to be loved by Elsie Norman. And the sick hopelessness of his desire had caused him to make a refuge in imagination. Whenever he saw her during infrequent visits to Rookhurst he became dry-throated and trembling with cold, but so great was his need and desire that he never lost hope; a spark always remained in the fire of his heart, and when older men, his friends, told him that he did not know what love was, his misery would turn to a pride of fury, and he would laugh bitterly and speak no more of her.

There had been moments when he had wanted to assoil himself, as a hunted stag soils in its pit, yet always he had been too fearful and disinclined; but often he had sought relief in drunken revelry with the comrades of his mess, until a certain point was reached when he would leave them and wander away in the night, until sought and found by certain hilarious souls, his sworn friends, who would drag him back with a cry of "Here's our old weary Willie mopin' again, I say, you fellows, and declarin' no one loves him! Drinks a' round, Willie! Where's 'at waiter?" Sometimes he

was not sought, and for hours he would watch the gun-flashes up the line in dark excitement, or go down to the picket lines to be with the "squadron" horses. Drink made him moody, but never quarrelsome. He did outrageously foolish and rash things, but never harm to a friend. On such occasions as when he might forget his despair, he could be exceedingly comical, imitating for the delight of the ante-room various regimental "characters" with a drollery and young conceit that endeared him to most of his brother officers; although a few of them disliked him and were curt with him, and in these cases he always attributed the fault to himself; he brooded on the reason of their dislike, and became subdued and miserable.

The splendid, bitter days of the war were often recalled as he lay on the shell beach in the sun, among dried bladder weed, black brittle dogfish eggshells, with tame animals and birds and rusty tins around him.

Suddenly he leapt up with a shout of happiness, and played with his animals, tumbling them about. As suddenly he tired of them, and taking his hazel snake-stick—a staff thick and straight, with a natural fork at one end, he ceased to speak to himself and started to walk away, followed by the puppies, the cats, the birds, and the otter. Moony Mat remained on his beam.

Years before the Great War, the lord of the manor, wishing to increase his revenues so diminished by taxes, tithes, betting, drinking and gambling, had installed machinery in the goyal for the mining of iron. When this had been done, miners had tunnelled into the hillside and sunken their shafts. The mountain was rich in iron ore, and deposits of tin, silver, copper, and manganese were found, but in such small quanti-

ties as to be commercially worthless. When the crushing and washing processes had been working for half a year a difficulty which somehow had not been considered before manifested itself. There was no means of removing the excellent ore. Rails for a trolley system to the valley top were therefore laid, when the question of freightage to the railway station, distant seven miles, caused a cessation of work. New carts were bought, new horses, and carters from distant hamlets engaged. The miners were turned into quarry men, masons and labourers, to work in Brakspears St. Flammea. Villagers talked of the coming prosperity. New cottages were built, and several of the workers took wives, when it was forced upon the squire that the wages paid out, the cost of fodder, and the railway charges to the port of Barnstaple were far greater than the money received for the ore. He continued the hillside borings for a further eighteen months, hoping to find some of the gold rumoured immemorially to be lying in that district of North Devon adjoining Exmoor. The complete failure to find anything but iron and negligible amounts of other metals was responsible for his complete abandonment to whiskey and his death a year later. The estate was sold. For many years afterwards the failure of the mining was discussed in the Nightcrow Inn, and the labourers of the hamlet shook their shaggy heads and lamented anew the death of the old squire. The farmers who had bought the land were dour and ungenerous: there was nothing like a gennulmun, they agreed. Every springtime more borage, houndstongue, nettle, hemlock, and other rank weeds flourished round the machinery shed; the iron roof grew more rusty and took on the hue of the red stone heaps.

Brambles and wild roses formed a natural screen for the holes gaping in the valley sides; rabbits at mating time chased one another around the machinery, till a stoat caused a terrified scamper. Up the chimneys the screech owl roosted, emerging from the stock at sunset like a white bloom magically unfolded. A fierce and wandering boar-badger, driven from his old home in Rookhurst beechwood, passed a winter in the valley; soon a holt was tunnelled, and it was deeply within this that the snow-badger licked the lusty whelps which her mate was so ferociously forbidden to approach. Here in the bracken the fox slunk unmolested, here the fearless tiercel swooped to his kill. The ragged creature that mouched about the buildings or slept in the engine house by day was ignored by the predatory creatures, since he was no more harmful to themselves than an oddmedodd. He, too, was a hunter, taking the rabbits that crouched in terror at his crawling stare, and snapping their necks with his enormous thumbs. From the borings into stilly twilight came the greater horseshoe bats, seeking dor-beetles and large moths; Jack o' Rags came out with them. The dark glittering eyes set in a black hairy face, the shag-ears, the large nose misshapen and discoloured by grains of black powder—in the dusk he came out like a monstrous bat shorn of wings. Rarely did he appear by day, and when first William explored the loft over the engine house Jack o' Rags leapt past him, his long knotted arms outstretched, and disappeared. William for the moment was alarmed, but the zany obviously had been the more terrified. Brownie at the Nightcrow Inn that evening had assured him that he was harmless—a poor mazed miner whose reason had left him ever since he had been buried in a premature explosion during blasting.

“His zister did take Jackierag to Exixir, way inland, do ee zee, Mis'r Meddlesome, but he come back sure enough. He runned away from un! Aiy, aiy! When a man be born in th' parish, zur, he can't abear zstrange parts. Long way to walk, nigh on fifty mile, but Jack o' Rags comed back the day after, surenuff!”

Brownie's voice had a rise and fall when he spoke quietly that gave him a mournful impression of the idiot's life. He pondered what strange influences had been responsible for his primitive, nomadic existence; what physical change in the brain had cast the man back thousands of years to the time of caves and the discovery of fire. Perhaps when certain cells were rendered inoperative his mind could not respond to impulses that an ordinary man received: perhaps it could receive only the crudest impulses—and so he could fascinate rabbits like a wild beast, and dwell like one in his underground lair.

“I am so happy,” he said to himself as he passed a yellow wagtail perched on a brown stone in the runlet, “and I shall live here for ever. What a silvery note that wagtail has. I expect his nest is somewhere near. By Jove, there is Jack o' Rags.”

He ceased to talk aloud, and paused to stare at the figure sleeping near the track that led up the hill, through heather, ferns and dwarfed holly bushes. Tim, Tatters growled, while Billjohn and Hereward slunk behind. Tatters barked sharply, the mazed fellow sprang up, glaring wildly about him. Billjohn and Hereward retreated still further, with their tails down, and Tim Tatters rushed away as he had from the goat that morning. But on seeing William the wild look died out of his eyes; he gave him a dead rabbit.

“Thank you,” replied William, but the idiot turned

and disappeared into the bracken. He harled the rabbit, hanging it in the middle of a thick thorn tree, then climbed higher up the track, until he reached the top of the hill. All the animals and birds except the dogs had gone back to the valley. It was pleasant to recline here on the sward, seeing the tiny cove a long way below with its grey boulders washed by the green waves. The goyal of thorn bushes and undergrowth narrowed as it rose for half a mile inland, and near the sky he could see the first cottages of the hamlet. There was no sound up here save the far roar of the sea beating against rocky cliffs of the coast, the whisper of a passing linnet, and the distant yelps of nesting gulls. Behind him the Atlantic was blue under a sun that had flamed since April without a cloud to shield the earth from its fire; sea and sky were fused by the heat till there was no horizon, and distant sailing ships seemed to be making skyey voyages. Into this still prospect of sea and sky the Corpsnout was thrust, its long patchwork body protruding unevenly for two miles until the massy head rested on sea-laved paws. For centuries the headland had been a haunt of wreckers, who tied lanterns to cows grazing there, to deceive the sailors into thinking they were binnacle lights of ships at anchor. Many a wooden vessel had had her back broken by the rocky paws of the Leap. A buoy now swung in the racing tide, but sometimes in winter a tramp or fishing trawler, lost in fog or driven by storm, had her plates ripped out by the black claws of Bag Leap.

CHAPTER III

THE RUDDLE VIXEN

HE rose, and walked on for an hour, joying greatly in the sun and the air. Over the remote tranquillity of landscape rose the blue hills of Dartmoor, forty miles southwards. The wild bees sang as they burred past to the thyme: the wind in the tufts of thrift stirred the pink flowers: somewhere a titlark was singing as it dived from the sky. Stonechats in summery vesture of brown and black perched on sprigs of furze and clacked their alarms to nestlings hidden in the brambles.

He was approaching the Corpsnout when his musings were interrupted by the behaviour of the puppies, some yards in front of him. They were standing still, pointing, their backs stiff, their tails stuck out. Billjohn gave a querulous growl and turned to see the god's face, and, reassured, the three trotted forward.

He saw a girl walking across Brakspear Down, which from where he was standing sloped gently downwards to the neck of the Corpsnout. She was a quarter of a mile away, and the top-part of the dress she wore was very white in the sunlight. He sat down and watched her slow progress among the sheep on the brown pasturage. The rising heat caused the fields and hedges to quiver brilliantly, and the thin cries of the flock rose with the torrid air. Sometimes she stopped; sheep were following her, and their thin bleats streaked

the quivering glassy brilliance of day. He saw her clamber over a gate, until she was hidden from him in a sunken lane called Stentaway. He rose and went to the lane by another way, but when he lept down into it he could not see her.

He walked up Stentaway lane, which was deep and cool, shaded by bushes of blackthorn, bramble, and dogwood. There were many flies here, and baby rabbits crouching under the leaves of dock and cow parsley. He called the pups to heel, forbidding them to touch or chase. The lane was steep, but he walked swiftly. It bent to the right at the top, so that the sun was in his face; there was no shade, except where the shadow of the telegraph pole was thrown obliquely across the lane. The single wire, connecting the coastguards' lookouts, made no humming; it was absolutely still in the air; a yellowhammer sat on it higher up, singing at intervals to a brooding mate in the hedge.

The lane led to Cryde Bay, but he turned sharply to the right up a rocky cart track, vaulted over a gate, and was on the first grazing field of the Corpsnout. The puppies, glad to be off the heated dust of the lane, rushed away over the brown sward. He walked on; his direction was now westwards, with the southern sun on his left cheek. A sheep track led past furze bushes curiously stunted and rounded like green puff-balls, in the roots of which rabbits had made their buries. Stonechats scolded him and the dogs, and a sparrowhawk dashed away from a stone wall on which it had been plucking a linnet. Larks were above, raining down their joy. Constantly daws called *jack, jack*, the sound mingling with the scrambling cries of gulls which had their nests far below the steep slope of green

bracken and gorse, where the slope ended in ragged cliffs that dropped sheer to the rocks and the sea. The daws flying above the blue water were black as burnt straws. Here on the headland the morn air was fresh and sweet.

The stony track rose gradually to its highest point, and he was able to see the north side of the Corpsnout for nearly two miles. Sound of iron on iron, a faint metallic *clenk*, made him look down the lefthand bend of the path. She was nearer than he had imagined, about thirty yards away, and having fastened the gate she turned and strolled on, turning at the questioning yapp of Billjohn and Hereward, but swinging round again immediately. Her blouse in the intense sunlight was a brilliant white against the yellow charlock of the oat field; her hair was auburn as the bars on the wings of a passing butterfly. She swung a sunbonnet on her wrist.

He watched her, then sat down and looked across three miles of azure water to Morte Point, seeing the coast of Wales beyond and faintly far away. He was uncertain what to do. Blue sea and fawn sands below would mean a cool and sparkling swim, and afterwards a sunbath and a lovely dream, lying on Vention sands while the young kestrels chattered in their eyrie in the cliff, and the pippits dived singing to their nests in the tussocks behind the grey boulders. A feeling of restlessness came to him, and he despised himself for following her, thinking to himself that it showed a weak character. He determined to go down to the sands and jumped on his feet, but took a last glance at the girl. She was no longer to be seen.

He hesitated, and decided not to go down to the sands. Under his hand he looked eagerly for her. The

pups followed him towards the gate and the oat field choked with charlock.

Just beyond the corner of the field a swarded cart track led through a brake of blackthorn to a small dis-used quarry, where once he had flushed a tiny and rare falcon called a merlin. It was a small quarry where grew wild ivy and stonecrop, and earlier in the year, bluebells and primroses. Brambles of blackberry and wild rose, no longer crushed by cartwheel, stretched across the path. He had a kettle hidden in a thorn in this quarry; often he had made a fire here, and brewed nettle tea. As he jumped over the briars, looking for her—"That's funny," he said to the dogs: "the ruddle vixen has gone to earth somewhere! Now, Tim Tatters, cast about for the lovely vixen's scent!—On, little boys, leu, leu, leu—find her line!"

The puppies pranced and whimpered. Hereward spoke. The one-and-a-half couple gave tongue. Turning round with an enormous and guilty start, he saw her sitting in the shade of an overwhelming rock, her chin rested on her hand. She looked at him, neither welcome nor resentment in her eyes which seemed to hold a wild gentleness and an absence of personal regard that made him ashamed.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

"Oh, don't do that," she replied. "Are you the shepherd after a lost sheep, or something? Or is this the opening meet of your foxhounds?"

"Yes," he replied. "I am Lord Tornsox, M.F.H. May I cap you?"

"I will give a subscription with pleasure if you promise to get a haircut and shave," came a serious and impersonal reply. "You're so young to wear a beard, Mr. Meddlesome."

He bowed ironically. "I am called Lord Tornsox of Rats' Castle. And this spaniel, madam, is my eldest son—the Honourable Tim Tatters. You see——"

Out of the rock just below her feet hartstongue ferns were growing, and realizing where she was sitting his buffoonery changed to alarm and he cried, pointing with his stick: "I say, don't move suddenly, will you? There's a nest of little robins under that arch of ferns. Be awfully careful!"

"I know," she answered with a swift sidelong smile. "I found them the other day. The mother is on the nest now. Don't be so worried! But, to ease your mind, I'll come down."

She rose upright, and he noticed the grace of her poise as she prepared to jump. She leapt from a height of five feet, alighting with her hands on his shoulders, and falling against him, so that he put his arms round her and held her.

"I say, have you hurt yourself?" he enquired, with tremendous anxiety, still holding her.

"Not really," she replied. "I was trying to show off, I suppose."

She sat down, and began to play with Billjohn.

"This little d-doggie is a sweet thing. What do you call him?"

"Oh, that's Billjohn. He was the nestledraff."

"The nestledraff?"

"The baby of the litter, you know. The Devon folk pronounce it nissledraff. It is usually the most affectionate."

"Oh, I I-love Billjohn," she replied rapturously, picking up the puppy and resting her cheek on its head. Billjohn tried more than ever to show his affection by licking her ears.

"You can have him," said William, contemplating her curve of cheek. She was holding the puppy against her throat and chin, regarding him all the time with glances of friendly eyes.

"That's very kind of you," she replied, "but I am certain that you must be very fond of him, Mr. Meddlesome."

"That old Brownie always calls me Mis'r Meddlesome, but darn ee if I shall let any one else call me that! Noomye!"

She laughed, saying, "How quaint you are! But what is your name, then?"

"My name is Maddison," he told her, "of Rats' Castle," he added.

He stood above her. Billjohn struggled away, and bounded to his master, who now had the whole upward regard of the blue-gray eyes. He could think of nothing to say, but the feeling of awkwardness had gone. Under the frank amity of the look he felt a pleasing content, and sometimes looked shyly at the loveliness of the face of the girl who sat on the sward. Her nose was straight, and her lashes were long and dark, and curved in profile—a view of which he was often permitted, as she turned her head swiftly to look at various objects; a sailing ship in the bay, a lizard on a sunny rock, a greenfinch among the furze. The lower lip was full, and red like a wild raspberry set in a complexion sea-tinged and scarcely freckled. She rested the weight of her turned shoulder on an arm uncovered to past the elbow; even as he noticed this she rolled higher the white silken sleeve.

"I love warmth," she explained. "Your arms are brown, aren't they? I can see the sun glinting on the

little gold hairs of your forearm. Somehow mine will not get deeply tanned like yours."

She held her arm for his inspection. He examined it with an air of impersonal interest, dreading lest he might offend her. He replied courteously, "The Greeks, you know, made their youths and maidens run races in the sun, for it was their ideal to have perfect bodies as well as lofty minds."

"My mind isn't very perfect," she said. "I am afraid I am not clever at all. In fact, I'm damned ignorant, as the Devon folk say of Cornish Cousin Jack. But you are a poet, aren't you? I simply adore poetry."

"Do you?" he enquired eagerly. "I am glad I met you. Do you like Shelley?"

"Oh, yes. The Cloud! 'I change, but I cannot die.' "

He was enthusiastic, and asked her if she did not agree with him that Francis Thompson, by virtue of his best poems, was among the greatest poets ever born?"

"Yes."

"Which poem do you like best?" he asked, suddenly very happy.

"Oh, all of them!"

"I haven't read them all," he told her. "You know that magnificent Corymbus for Autumn, and The Mistress of Vision?"

"Very beautiful, aren't they?" she agreed, looking on the ground. The arm outflung rendered smooth the shoulder under its silky covering. Just so, he thought, might a maiden of ancient Greece recline after her dance in the violet meadows.

He desired to discuss further the golden music

fetches to earth by that strayed angel, but before he could continue she had said:

"Do you come here every day?"

"Most days. Often I go out on the headland, and watch the peregrine falcon lording it over the whole bird-world."

"Hawks are cruel things, I think."

"They kill to live, like everything else. Except, perhaps, some men, who live to eat."

"You look as though a good square meal wouldn't be amiss, anyhow! Have you got anyone who cooks for you?"

He shook his head.

"I believe you must be half starved."

"No, I'm not."

He stared skywards at a gannet, a great fishing bird from Lundy Island.

"Are you a poet?" she repeated.

Again he shook his head, and murmured in confusion, "No."

"I should have thought you were a poet; but perhaps you are, without knowing it. Isn't the sun glorious? Doesn't it make you feel that you would like enormous teeth to bite into it? How about that for the subject of a rhyme?"

He laughed, and the girl smiled into his eyes; he felt very happy. "What is your real name?" she demanded suddenly.

"William Maddison."

They both looked up at the gannet, which had made a harsh cry.

"Are you living down here?" he asked.

"For a little while longer."

"Only a little while?"

“Yes. I expect so.” Then she added: “Do they call you Bill?”

He hesitated before replying that he used to be called Willie.

“Willie,” she repeated, as though testing the sound of the abbreviation. “Willie—Willie. No, I don’t like Willie. You should be called Billy.”

“That’s better than Meddlesome or Tornsox, anyway.”

She laughed, so sweetly, he thought. “May I call you that?”

“What, Tornsox? But you do, don’t you?”

“You want whipping, young man.”

The gannet dived with a splash after a fish, transfixing it with its beak. They watched it excitedly. He sat beside her.

“I say, what’s your name?” asked William when it had flown away.

“I am Eveline Fairfax,” she replied briefly, scratching her head and glancing at him mischievously.

“Oh, I see.”

The puppies were stretched out on the sward burnt and parched by the droughty heat. Jackdaws winged by overhead, and she looked up while he stared at her blue-gray eyes, radiant and mirthful and fringed with dark lashes. Her teeth were white as a young terrier’s: how soft was her throat, how vivid her hair; and she would no longer look at him. She was staring over the sea, where the fishing boats in the Bristol Channel seemed to be hanging in mist and sky. Becalmed on the windless blue, the sails looked as though the faintest breeze would lift them as brown butterflies adance on airy nothingness.

“It has occurred to me,” she went on whimsically,

not looking at him, "that a child of your years—let me see, I should imagine you to be about three and twenty—wearing a beard—a beard curiously uneven, let me tell you. It occurs to me that there is a mystery about your monastic and secluded life down here. Now, don't be offended—or rather, do not let your sensitiveness cause you to be offended."

"I know I must look rather terrible."

"No, I do not mean that exactly. What I think, however, is that you should shave it off at the earliest opportunity. I am sure you would look much nicer."

He felt a fool, and said so.

"Oh, don't feel a fool, Mr. Maddison. It is only a pose, isn't it?" she suggested.

"Oh, no," he hastened to assure her.

"Now I have wounded the poet's feelings, but I confess to a malicious satisfaction."

"I suppose you think that my living down here alone is a pose, too?"

"Not deliberate, I am sure, Mr. Maddison. But are you l-living alone?"

"Except for a few birds and animals—some I found broken, and mended them."

"Oh, you dear thing," she said in a voice low and full of charm, while she gave him a shy glance through lowered lids.

"Do you have any visitors there?"

He shook his head, and looked mournfully on the parched sward, thinking of his life's change since the war.

"And have you no friends or relatives?"

"I have a father somewhere, I think."

"You only think! What a vague young man it is!

Do tell me some more. I believe you are a poet after all, and that the paternal relative hoofed you forth because you were discovered writing rhymes by candle-light."

"Oh, no," he replied, vaguely and aloofly.

"Have you any brothers or sisters, or a mother, Mr. Maddison?"

"My mother died when I was born."

"Poor child," she murmured, and in the quiet they both heard the distant cries of sheep, pitiful cries for water that quavered into the heated air. The hill springs had long dried up, the dewponds evaporated. A small flock was crossing the base of the Corpsnout.

"The sky does not care whether they live or die," he exclaimed in a tone that surprised her, "and the same indifference is shown to mankind. How much longer will man dumbly turn his eyes to an imponderable deity? The only thing that cares for us is ourselves. And when a man of vision does appear, he is either destroyed or neglected. Listen, I will read you something!"

He pulled a book from his pocket, and read with a wild fervour.

My heart looks back and sympathises with all the joy and life of ancient time. With the circling dance burned in still attitude on the vase; with the chase and the hunter eagerly pursuing, whose javelin trembles to be thrown; with the extreme fury of feeling, the whirl of joy in the warriors from Marathon to the last battle of Rome, not with the slaughter, but with the passion—the life in the passion; with the garlands and the flowers; with all the

breathing busts that have panted beneath the sun. O beautiful human life! Tears come in my eyes as I think of it. So beautiful, so inexpressibly beautiful!

He finished reading, and turned away.

“There are tears in your eyes, too,” she said.

“He was always very poor and very earnest—like Christ,” he said, wistful and aloof once more.

“Is that why you wear a beard?” she enquired. “But that’s a beastly thing to say, isn’t it? Are you hurt?”

He shook his head, thinking that she would not understand how the remark had hurt, not himself, but an Idea. With a dull feeling he compared the remark with her loveliness of form.

She despises me, was his thought, as he stopped to watch the sheep whose cloven feet rattled on the hard ground. They were scraggy, gasping in the heat, fixing their eyes upon him as though beseeching green grass. With pain he noticed that the flanks of several were crawling with maggots, that even now heavy-winged flies were laying the eggs which shortly would hatch. The sheep showed no fear of the dogs: they had come to him, who appeared as a godhead, for relief: while overhead in a sky blue and hard as a sapphire burned the sun. One lay down, a froth on its nostrils. Its sides were raw. Its woolly skin flapped on its side like stiff leather. Maggots had eaten it loose. He turned away from the agony of the dying animal. Was there a beneficent deity directing all earthly endeavour—caring for the things it had created? Six months since, and half the world was a shambles, men destroying one another.

“There is no help anywhere,” he murmured to him-

self, with a sudden choking flutter of the throat: "and yet there must be some purpose in Beauty other than reproduction. Sky, give me some light, that I may reveal to men that they are all brothers—that they must strive no more among themselves!" His eyes brimmed, and yet he was not weeping. The sudden emotion, from his innermost mind, caused moisture to start: he blinked, and brushed his eyes with his sleeve: and felt calm once more. Mrs. Fairfax was forgotten.

At that moment a flock of chattering starlings wheeled over his head, and alighting on the animals' back, commenced to devour the maggots. William, now contemplating with his conscious mind—the workaday mind—experienced no distress: 'sheep were for man to eat for his meals. But he felt a relief; then he saw that she had turned and was waiting for him. The thought of talking to her gladdened him, and he ran after her, while the puppies barked, and tried to tear pieces of cloth from his trousers. Hereward succeeded in ripping his left leg just as he got to her. He regarded it ruefully.

"I say!" she said.

"Yes?" he waited.

"Let's go across the Corpsnout to Cryde Bay, and bathe! Then I'll sew up your trousers. I'm so glad you didn't beat your puppy for doing it."

"I shall have to swim in my clothes."

"Oh, dear, that must not happen, Mr. Maddison. I don't want to ruin that exquisite crease in your trousers. Besides, the dye might run in the water, and they would lose that beautiful hue of the earth."

"I think you are a very sarcastic person."

"Sorry if I hurt your feelings."

"No, of course not. I feel rather a scarecrow to go to Cryde Bay with a lady."

"No one of the slightest importance to me or you lives at Cryde Bay. And I'm not a lady." Her smile seemed perfectly serious.

"Well, do you mind if I leave you here and come over after lunch?"

"If you don't forget to come."

"I shall not forget. Au revoir!"

"Au revoir, Mr. Willie Maddison. Now, don't put on that rueful air. It is really a very good name." She turned and walked down the path, while he went back to Sealion Cove because he had forgotten to dress Oswald's wing. He walked effortlessly, and sang most of the way. Linnets in the air piped reedily with golden upstrokes of song, there was the twitter of goldfinches among the furze-bloom, the whistling of a blackbird in the goyal, the flicker of a careless peacock butterfly. He thought no more about the drought and its miseries—he thought of a cloudy splendour that gave out joy, of perfection arising before the gaze of his mind.

CHAPTER IV

SILKEN THREADS

"I WAS afraid you wouldn't come," she exclaimed, meeting him on the sands of Cryde Bay. He wore a pair of trousers less ragged, and a clean shirt. His hair was brushed and his nails were cut. He noticed that she had powdered almost imperceptibly her face, and her lips were touched with a suggestion of scarlet. A dark blue bathing dress was slung over her shoulder.

They sat on the rocks, while she kicked off her shoes and began to remove her stockings. He watched the gulls patrolling the surf till she had finished, and then offered to carry them, stowing them carefully in his belt.

"Away! Loathèd shoon," she laughed, flinging them on the sand. "Excuse awful sight of big feet, won't you?"

He realized that he was intended to make a reply, so he said that they seemed perfect and small. Eveline held one foot up for his inspection, extending pink toes.

"They are lovely feet," he said gravely.

"Is that why you wrinkle your forehead?"

He made no reply, and she said:

"But, of course, I know—to a man like you the idea is more vivid than reality."

Slowly he said, "It isn't really, but, you see, when one has——"

"Life is cruel to the beauty it creates," she interrupted. "Did you notice those poor sheep?"

Her words, and the suggestion of an impersonal sadness in her charming voice, made him look quickly at her, but she appeared unconcerned at his regard. A dead guillemot, sodden bundle of black and white feathers, lay in a pool slowly being filled by the tide. She touched it with her foot, with seeming carelessness, and it rolled over in the water.

"Well, what are you thinking?"

"I was thinking of what you said about life being cruel. Has it been cruel to you?"

"Oh, no. I am resigned, that is all. To the cage of life, maybe. But do not let me worry you with my troubles."

"Have you any?" he asked. "You won't worry me, really. I would try and understand—oh, you will laugh at me."

"No, Mr. Maddison, of course I will not," she replied, touching his hand. "One does not laugh at sincerity."

His heart was filled with such happiness that he wanted to shout and leap into the air. He had found a companion at last. He saw that her eyes were soft and bright, her gaze sweetly given for him.

"You are like a lark that sings for joy," he said in a low voice. "I can only stand below and watch you, and listen."

"I'm going to paddle," she replied, and walked away. He sat still. He looked at the few people on the sands, and then realized that perhaps he had given offence. He got up and wandered in the opposite direction, away from the sea whither she was going. A disused limekiln was built on the rocks by highwater mark, and he went to inspect it. Sea-rocket and samphire grew

on the stones beside it. Here he sat down, and after a few minutes went back to the rocks where they had been talking.

When later he rejoined her, she did not appear to notice his return, but continued to walk quietly in the shallows. Disregarding his trousers, he waded in a foot of water, and said hurriedly that he had brought her stockings.

"Your dogs are looking for you," she answered, turning to look at the puppies who dared not follow him. "Don't distress them any more. Besides, your best trousers are getting wetter every second. Can't you roll them up? I say, you didn't mean that about the lark, did you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Fairfax, I did really."

"I thought you were trying to be funny. Forgive me, Mr. Maddison, please. Do you think me horrid?"

He felt joyful once more. Here was one who believed as he did, one whose freedom of spirit was probably inherited from some far ancestress, one who was not a type crushed into inanity by civilization. How sublime was the adventure, how the gleaming wavelets washed her feet: he could sing aloud for the happiness that life had given him. It was sufficient to be with her, to dream of her perfection, to feel that she would be a great friend; and with a sudden departure of joy he remembered that she was married. But he said: "I think you are sweet, and I—I like you."

She shrugged her shoulders, parted her lips, and lifted her eyebrows, giving him a sidelong glance of pretended indifference, purposely exaggerated, as a child might. "I'm married," she said.

"I know," he stammered.

"Who told you?"

"I heard it at the Inn."

"Oh!"

"Is that what you meant by being chained?"

She said, "Oh, no," but immediately his mind conceived her to be a tragic figure; and, seeing his serious face, she flipped him lightly on the cheek with her bathing dress, and said whimsically: "You won't run away, will you, Mr. Maddison? Shall we bathe? Didn't you get a bathing dress at the store in Cryde village as you came through?"

He told her that he had no money with him. Immediately the smile went from her face and a hurt look came into it.

"Oh, why didn't you ask me for money, dear boy? I had no idea that you might be hard up. Look here, can I help you in any way? I haven't got much with me, but in the cottage——"

His heart was warmed by her generosity. He told her that he had never expected to bathe at Cryde Bay. In Sealion Cove, he said, he did not need any garment, since no one ever came near it in the early morning or at dusk.

"How shocking!" was her simulated reproof.

"But I can bathe in my trousers," he said: "they dry afterwards in a very few minutes."

"Can you swim? There's a pretty dangerous current at half tide. It drowned two people during the war. The Claw, you know."

"I know," said William. "I was here with a cousin of mine on leave. He's in camp at Findlestone now, I believe."

"Phillip Maddison?"

"Yes, do you know him?"

“Of course I know Phillip! How funny that you should be his cousin! Dear old Phèa! We are awful great pals. I met him at a dance given by his battalion. He was awfully disconsolate, poor old boy, and standing about all by himself.”

They talked about Phillip Maddison, agreeing that he was an extraordinary fellow; then decided to bathe. “See you in a minute,” she said, and, waving her hand, she went towards the rocks.

They declared that it was the most wonderful bathe of their lives. At first he was apprehensive in trousers, but immediately she made him forget it by envying the tan of his arms and shoulders.

“I must hold my arms to the sun,” she said, “the sun that is the giver of joy. I wish I was big enough to bite chunks out of that great gold orb! Tell me, my child, is any of my unruly hair coming out under the cap?”

“No,” he answered, going near just to see the soft neck. “I wonder if you would do me a favour?”

“What is it?”

“Will you let your hair down in the sunshine? I think a woman’s hair is so glorious. Let me see it shining and free.”

“It’s very ordinary hair,” she said, “and perhaps you would be disappointed.”

“But please do!”

“No, Mr. Maddison, I am afraid I cannot. What would that elderly gentleman who lives in that green house up there think of me? For I have noticed that he passes many mornings at an open window with a pair of glasses. No, I shall not let you see my womanhood’s crowning glory, and I think that if you had used

original epithets for its description it would have been more sincere: although I know that Rupert Brook is a pretty good poet."

She spoke in such a droll way, and with such suppressed radiance in her face that, with a wild impulse, he put his arms round her shoulders and kissed her cheek. Alarmed by the unbreathing stillness of her during the shy and, as it were, natural embrace, he ran into the shallows and plunged into a curling green breaker. He swam submerged as far as possible, and then came up, shaking water from his eyes. She was just behind him, and swimming with easy overarm stroke, breasting the waves and laughing among the silver sunpoints of the foam.

She made no reference to what he had done. The salt water darkened her lashes and gave a maiden purity to her eyes; two curls of auburn hair were damp against her cheeks, and her arms were smooth and rounded and white.

"Oh, I must shout, yell, sing! Hey, old gull, you laugh, too! Is there anything so lovely as swimming? Do you see Lundy Island on the horizon? I feel that I could leap like a salmon into the air and dive right under the sea, and come up alongside in a second, fling my arm over it and haul myself into the warmth."

"Mind, we're out of our depth," he warned; "remember the Claw!"

"Now is the supreme moment to die," she exulted, "to be drowned together! Are you a good swimmer?"

"Yes, fairly."

"Well, then, let's swim out and risk being drowned. Are you game?"

"Yes," said William, "come on," turning round and taking a few strokes seawards.

“Oh, come back,” she cried; “I didn’t mean it.”

“Funk!” he answered, by her side.

“If you mock me,” she jested, “I will bite you.”

“When you’ve bitten the sun into small pieces?”

“Bearded Beast,” she snorted, swimming away from him.

He pursued her, and caught her by the shoulder, when she pleaded for grace: immediately afterwards telling him in a mocking voice that she liked him to frown.

“Drown me with your firm brown hands round my neck, strong man. Bow wow! No, no, I didn’t mean it. I was pretending I was the heroine in a story. Oh, you are a great rough thing! First you kiss me, then you run away like a startled deer, then you push me under water. Really, you know, Mr. Maddison, it is not done, to duck a lady—I should say an imperfect lady. For how long have you known me?”

He was alarmed again, but she threw water over him and swam away laughing. He chased her with a shout of joy, and splashed her, mid entreaties for mercy; and so they went on, thinking nothing, hardly realizing how they spoke, or what they were saying. They wandered three hours on the sands before dressing. Stilly in sunny air floated the June hours, and somehow they were in a cottage parlour, and Eveline was pouring out tea, and her eyes in the shade were lovely and meditating as those of a child who sits in a meadow singing to the blue cranesbill flowers it has gathered. Then their glance would soften and go out to him as his heart beat proudly for the company of her beauty. No mortal was near them: the cottage-wife was a wraith who appeared and faded. Again they were on the sands, wandering by the pools, and standing on the rocks

while the tide crept in, maintaining by warm hand-clasps a steady balance. A flow of birdsong was come into the air, and a golden highway was opened across the sea; the foam was tinged with purple as though along that western ocean road the carousing sun was spewing the wine he had quaffed all that day at the tavern of the drouthy earth. Venus shone in the luminous lower air, a chaste wife watching his return, with her the virginal and breastless moon her daughter. While they watched, he said: "I make up things like that to amuse myself." Eveline, with a little sigh, told him that she used to do the same thing, pressing with her hand to convey that which words denied her. Long was the parting on the hillside, the dread severance delayed till all the stars were aglitter in the tranquil night of the summer. At last, at last, it had to be; one more goodbye breathed in the dewfall, one more lingering wait, and up the hill he went with his dogs, in his head held so proudly high a sweet mazeful wonder of loveliness.

CHAPTER V

DEBATE AT THE NIGHTCROW

LIGHT of foot and heart went he, leaving the Corp-snout behind as he struck inland over Brakspear Down. Somewhere in the towns and cities the clocks ticked off tame hours of an artificial life, but here no time existed. William strode on, treading fields of starved oats that waged a continual war with thistles, fern, vetch and bindweed. Sometimes he paused so that he might hear the sounds of the quiet night: the hum of a beetle, the purring rattle of a far evejar perched on a dead stump in the bracken, the snuffling of the puppies and Hereward's thin whine of enquiry at a rabbit bury. In the west over a steely sea the horizon lifted with sunset-dark hoverings, the glow of some great conflagration beyond the world. Overhead the sky was dyed with indigo, and there the same stars winked that he had watched from the fields of Rookhurst, from the London streets, from Chunuk Bair, from the hills of Picardy. Here nothing was between himself and the wheeling stars, no smoke or fog, no snarling nightbombers or angry-red fireprick of shrapnel. There over the sea were Castor and Pollux, the heavenly twins, and yellow Capella. There, too, was Spica Virginis the maiden, his own bright star, near Corvus the raven and Regulus the lion. He remembered the night five years ago when he had stood at the edge of Crowstarver's Spinney and through his tears bidden farewell to the village

where the long years of childhood and boyhood had passed so happily. Eveline had said that one yearned in childhood for the wonderful garden of the grown-up world, whereas in reality the tragedy of age was the realization that one had left forever a much happier garden—in spite of the little griefs and the little tragedies.

A short-eared owl beat with slow flight over his head and cut short his retrospection. Suddenly he realized that his pets in the cottage had not been fed since sunrise that morning. He regarded them with remorseful impatience; for to-morrow as early as possible he was going over to Cryde Bay. The last cornfield, a rock-strewn patch sown with corn and growing with weeds, was left behind and the open down was before him. A growl from one of the dogs, and he had stopped. Something was near him: the footfalls ceased with his own. He glanced fearsomely behind him, grasped his stick more firmly and hurried on. The three puppies kept quietly at his heels. Once more he swung round, to hear fading in the night a faint padding.

The puppies regained their spirits and trotted around him. He walked on until an abrupt realization that the dogs were alarmed made him halt once again. They rushed back from something in front, and cowered behind him. He felt as though a brush had been drawn up his hair, his jaw went forward, and in a voice instinctively rasping he enquired who was there, but there was only a sound like a groan bubbling through something thickly liquid. He advanced again, holding the stick before him. He could make out in the spectral starshine a patch on the ground. Step by step he went forward, stopping with fear as the gurgling sigh came once more.

By the wavering light of a match shielded in his hand he saw with relief that it was only a sheep. Instantly the gore on the brittle grass informed his mind that the mysterious worrier had torn its throat, and gnawn one side of its head. A bubble of blood was blown from its nostrils, and then the match burned his fingers. Fear come to him as he thought of the sinister beast lurking in the darkness, a beast whose ravening he had disturbed. A beast that would leap up at him, tearing as it had the ewe in whose throat the blood was sticky and frothed. The fear gave place to an alert calmness, and he struck another match, searching for slot or track of the raider. His hand bumped into something, and by the fitful gleam of one more match he saw that it was a miner's flang, or pick. Blood and wool fouled one end. It might have been lying there when the raider bore its prey to the ground. William hurried to the hamlet, pausing many times to listen, an awful doubt in his mind.

The conversation in the Nightcrow Inn was intense when he entered. A debate was evidently being held among half a dozen men near the door, since each man was talking at once in a loud voice, and ignoring what the others said. Brownie, wearing his special Saturday night garb of a khaki tunic with a deciduous bowler, was regarding with dolour the quart pot before him, and smoking a short cutty. Under the lamp the card party was playing whist for quarts of beer. Old Muggy sat in his usual corner, smoking cigarettes in a long tube, and exclaiming after each lead, as he had for years:

“What be that? A spade? I've got a spade. Gorbruggee, trumped! Why didn't I throw a spade away last round? What be that? A club? Zecond player

play low. Jannie's ace, and I ain't got a club. Li'l trump. Hey, that be our trick!" as The Tiger endeavoured to rake the grimy cards into his pile.

William looked joyously round the company of men who wore their second-best clothes and hats, with clean shirt but no collar or tie, thinking that the faces of the landlord's two daughters, leaning over the bar and joking with some youths drinking lemonade, were like flowers in the smoke. Everyone was happy, himself happiest of all. Landlord was smiling and asking him what he would have, no scowling faces anywhere: boots stamped on the stone floor, earthstained suits of corduroy, shapeless hats, ancient granfers sitting muffler-wrapped and silent in the corners, dogs and puppies playing and chasing one another and squirming under everybody's legs, Brownie crying, "Willum Jan—Willum Jan—look ee at the dogs, fine li'l boys they be, Mis'r Meddlesome, midear! Zo ee went to Cryde Bay s'marnin and zeed li'l ruddle maid!"

William sat beside him and shouted into his ear that he didn't want everybody to know where he had been, and would Brownie keep the secret? Brownie replied, "That's right, midear. It bant no one else's bizniz! Don't ee be afear'd, no one'll knaw!"

He suspected that everyone in Brakspears St. Flamea must know by now that he had been to Cryde Bay. He drank from Brownie's pot, and Brownie drank from his.

"Doan't ee go yet, Mis'r Meddlesome, zur, doan't ee go yet, midear. Zstop alongome and have a li'l confirmational conversation. Bide awhile, midear, wi' old Broonie."

"No, I must go, Brownie. I've got to get my bread

and potatoes and other things. Drink up, and have another."

"Thank ee, Measter," replied Brownie, draining his pot. "Willum Jan, Tattery, Yerwood, stoppit! Praper li'l dogs they be, aiy aiy! Bread and tetties for dinner! Gorbrugge! Mis'r Meddlesome, will ee do me th' honour of having a bite long o' me at dinner to-morrow?"

"Thank you, I will," he answered, flattered by the invitation. Brownie shouted at his acceptance.

"Did you go zwimmun over to Cryde Bay to-day, zur?" asked the landlord, in a low confidential voice, as he took Brownie's mug.

"Yes, I strolled that way to-day," Willum told him.

"Aiy, I heard tell-on you were zeen over there," volunteered the landlord, disappearing through the doorway to the barrel room. Coming back with the ale, William whispered for the loan of a razor. Secretly and with a smile he was given it; he went to the village shop for his bread and for half a pound of butter and a pot of jam, meaning to ask Eveline to tea. The grocer waved aside several children patiently holding enormous baskets, and money clasped tight in small fists, to attend to him.

"That's a lovely bit o' butter, zur," he said, "fresh from Varmer Jan Smith of Crowberry. Two shillun, zur: butter be tarrible scarce. Thay be charging six shillun a pound in Ilfracombē, too, and the same fur cream. 'Tis the drought, zur, and the war. Well, an what do you think of Cryde Bay, zur? Hot on the zands, weren't it?"

"Oh, were you there to-day?" enquired William.

"No, zur. Too buzzy. Us poor men have to work all the day. Ony thing else, zur?"

"No, thank you, Arty."

"Can't I sell you a nice li'l pork chop, zur? Killed me pig only on Thursday."

"I shan't want any meat this week end, thanks."

"No, zur," sympathized the grocer, while the children watched him humbly. "I expect yule be dining over to Cryde Bay, zur, now you've got a bit of company? Mrs. Fairfax is a very nice lady, zur, if you will pardon me zaying so."

William bade him good-night and went out, suddenly to return.

"Oh, Arty, give the children some sweets, will you? A bob's worth."

The children stared humbly as before, five of them, and did not make a sound.

"What do ee zay, now?" reproved Arty; "th' genulmun has bought zome zweets for ee."

Four pairs of eyes stared at him (one child was blind) unblinking.

"Say 'Thank ee, Mis'r Maddizun,'" ordered Arty, sternly.

"Mis'r Maa'sn,"

"Mis'r Maa'sn,"

"Mis'r Maa'sn,"

"Mis'r Maa'sn,"

"Mis'r Maa'sn,"

they lisped in turn, never moving their eyes from his face.

"They'm shy," Arty made excuse.

Yet their abashless gaze was upon him. So, suddenly thought William, as he went down the valley path, was Mrs. Fairfax—a true and everlasting com-

radeship was to be between them, and her heart could no more help telling him by a hundred natural signs than the shy, dumb children could help showing, in their unwinking stare, the awe they felt in the majestic presence of a gennulmun.

The rill rested in a little tarn just before losing itself in the shingle, and as he passed he heard a faint whistle. He turned towards it, calling *tikkytikkytuck*. There came to him a noise like the scrupeting of an ungreased axle, and the stars that shone in the black water quivered and went out. A splash, and Isaak greeted him with a low *tickytuck*. Hereward sniffed; the cub turned and went into the water, with its alarm cry—a mewling chatter.

“*Tikkytikkytuck*,” crooned the master, and it reappeared, and followed him swiftly into the cottage.

He felt remorse at the frenzied greetings given him by his pets. The kittens mewed, the birds squawked, and Oswald hopped in and out of his feet, dragging its broken wing. Fortunately there was some stew remaining in the stockpot, and this they were given. He found the rabbit in the bush where he had hung it, skinned it and put it on to boil with some potatoes, carrots and barley. In the starlight Mrs. Large and Mrs. Larger were visited and milked; Isaak drew comfort from a bottle, the kittens and the puppies lapped from a dish. While the driftwood crackled and the flames flapped around the pot, he shaved his beard with many groans, and then sat and surveyed the hearth, thinking how he could pass the time to the morrow: he did not want to go to bed: he was not tired: nor could he read: the words meant nothing to him. As he stared unseeing it was borne upon him how lonely and purposeless was his life in the cottage:

a mere existence. He shivered, and hugged his knees. What would happen in the future? His mind, busy with beauty, cast aside the speculation. The present only mattered. One might be dead on the morrow. That was the philosophy during the war, and it applied equally to life.

He sat there, and heaved more wood on the fire when the flames lessened. Through the window a star burned in winking colours. The puppies slept on the old trousers, Becky was washing Pie upon the bookshelf. No sound came to the midnight dreamer save the wash of the sea, ceasing never, the dry whisper of the beetles exploring the floor for scraps of food, the hoot of an owl, or the squeak and scuffle of rats. He yawned many times, but his brain was never so active—how the star was like a dancing kingfisher! While others slept, he would cherish the wonder in his heart. With his long thin Arab-like foot (for he had removed his shoes) he stroked and smoothed the heads of Isaak and the pups. The sound of the waves as they rung a phantom carillon on the drowned shells died away in the night, the tide reached its lowest ebb, the last ember ceased to tinkle in the grate. Huddled in the ancient armchair, William drowsed, to awake with hope high in his heart, and to see Jack o' Rags at the open door with a crab in his hand. The zany laid his offering on the doorstone, and slouched away without speaking. Immediately Isaak seized it and started to crack it up.

CHAPTER VI

FLAXEN THREADS

THEY met on the Corpsnout the next morning, and went down to the deserted Vention sands on the north side of the headland. The sun shone brightly for them, and a white mist lay over an unmoving sea. William was so happy that he was not conscious of happiness. Time did not exist. The past was nothing; the future was nothing; the fair present was everything. Introspection was gone. Enough that she was Eveline, a wonderful companion with whom he talked as though he had known her all his life, as they ran and walked on the sands. They bathed, afterwards lying among the big blue and grey boulders at the edge of the land till the sun was high above them. Reluctantly they arose and scrambled up the little footpath through the thistles and brambles of the cliff. He went first, helping her over rough places. Once she nearly slipped or seemed to; he caught her round the waist, and exerted an unnecessary amount of strength in assuring himself that she would not fall. Reaching the top, they passed along the path through the withering barley. The girl led the way; occasionally she turned, and each time he dwelt on the glowing cheeks, the bright eyes, the ardent hair, the white neck. How proud was her bearing, and yet when he looked again it was that of an eager child. The spirit of the wild

was within her young body, the beauty of the sea within her eyes.

“Why so silent, W-William?”

He was but wool-gathering, he hastened to say.

“Well, from the look in your eyes, I should say you were not wool-gathering.” She waited a moment for him to draw level with her, and linked her arm in his, looking into his face.

“Share them with me, won’t you?”

They passed through the sickly corn, and came to a stile at the end of the path. On this they sat, while the heated air in the barley made a dry dissonance with the summer wavelets that on the white sands curled and crashed with distant murmur. Their shoulders touched; his left hand, pressed on to the spray-rutted wood, lay against her smaller one.

He did not speak, and she linked her little finger with his.

“Tell me what you are thinking of,” she begged.

“Oh, but I cannot,” he exclaimed, looking on the ground.

“Go on,” she whispered; “don’t be shy with me, W-William.”

A gorsebird made its incessant stoneclacking cry. After several hesitant beginnings he said:

“I can’t tell you!”

“But do!”

Nothing was said. He looked towards a dingle grooved between the hills, choked with thorn and holly. After awhile she murmured, “You haven’t told me.”

Two black birds passed over from the mainland, croaking down the blue sky. They were ravens sailing to their nest on the Corpsnout.

"I believe you want to humiliate me," she complained.

"No, Mrs. Fairfax," he said gently. "I am almost afraid to tell you. I am afraid of life. Look across the sea, the summer sea that is blue and divine! We breathe the wind that flows from the immortal sky. We are living things in the midst of beauty! To me, that is a perpetual wonder! Look at those patches of trefoil on the terrace over there—gold sparks from the anvil of some heavenly farrier, shoeing the swift steeds of sunrise. Everywhere there is life, and my mind comprehends its beauty. Listen! that is a pippit fetching down song from the sky. Sometimes I feel that I can see the spirit beyond that song. I feel that the spirit has been unchanging since the first life stirred on the cooling crust of the great fireball of the earth. I seem to glimpse it as something too beautiful for words, and that the spirit of mankind is one with it—one in a luminous realm of beauty. And then I think that this is only an illusion, that it is a function of the mind that is self-induced. Terrible thought! That all is illusion! But I can see the mind of mankind built up of impressions throughout the centuries, from the blue sea and the sun-sparkle on it, from the blown hair of the wind, from the odour of the flower. And from impressions also the bird has got its song, and the common dandelion has got its colour. Sometimes at night I lie and watch the stars and then I feel how much greater I am than those suns hurtling and roaring through space—because they are but matter, and I am a mind! And then, suddenly, my ecstasy goes as I think of all the hunger and disease on this little cooling fireball which we call the world—there should be no hunger, no slum-consumption, no wars!

That is what I think about—wars and consumption, wasting disease, and strife! All caused by man's desire of happiness—because he follows false ideals. I can sympathize with all men, for I'm a man who wants happiness, not riches, but just someone to live with me in my cottage, and love me, and believe the truth that I draw from the wells of my spirit—ah, what am I saying? What would I do with a beloved if she came? I have no money: only my dreams to give her. But how I would love her! You must be laughing at me! But I don't care—I haven't spoken—the real me hasn't spoken—to anyone for years. I had one friend, once—he was a friend. . . .”

His voice ended on a mutter. She gently covered his hand with her own, and said nothing. The summer stir of the sea was soothing like a whisper. She waited, her eyes gentle and sweet, and softly the wistful voice went on:

“The day before I met you I sat here, and loved the sun, the sea, and the sky. Suddenly I was afraid: for I can love all these things, but one day I must leave them. I realized that I should grow old, that I should die, and still the wind would shake the poppy, the blue butterfly seek the harebell, and the trefoil be yellow on the hillside. I shall be gone—dead—and nothing I can do now can avert that. Nothing that we can do can stay death. And yet we hasten it—think of the war—the dead men at Suvla Bay, in the burning scrub—or drowned in Flanders mud. . . .”

The voice broke in distress. She made no sign that she heard. Only the bleached barley went *sish-sish*, and the waves sighed on the strand below. Then he saw on the path before him the two wings of an admiral

butterfly. Its body had gone—only the two wings were there. Perhaps a finch had caught it with a snap of its bill, and, pulling the wings off, had devoured the body. How beautiful they looked, lying on the earth. Born, perhaps, a few hours before—a creature of sunlight, finding happiness in flickering along with colour-dusty sails, pausing to talk to a flower swaying on its stem, a flower as wonderful and fragile as itself. Perhaps with another admiral it had danced in the summery air, flaunting the gorgeous bars and spots of blue, black and scarlet. All that was over, now; the wings lay on the earth, useless things, meaningless things. The sun might shine, but the colours meant nothing; the wind might waft along other butterflies, to pause over the broken fans of glory. The same pitiless indifference was shown to all things upon the earth. The spirit of joy in the butterfly had gone—but where? With the wind that bore it, into the blue sky that gave its royal assent to joy; its tiny spirit absorbed into that which gave all things life.

These were his thoughts. They went on up the hill, a mournful fatigue making dull his mind. At the crest they rested, and she turned away from him. She lay beside a plum-thistle, touching its cardoon with a stem of grass.

“What is the matter?” he asked, turning to her, for she had not spoken or looked at him for ten minutes.

“Nothing,” she said humbly. She pulled the flower of the thistle, and with averted eyes she said, “You wakened things in me that I thought dead, that is all. You made me feel a mindless clod.” Impulsively she held his coat and leaned forward. “Lovely smell your

coat has. Wood smoke and salt wind, and wild thyme. Poor, lonely, dreaming youth—I wish I could help you.”

He did not move, but the wild pain in his heart seemed to be echoed by a curlew crying over the wasted uplands.

Very quiet and subdued she seemed at the parting place.

“Well, I shall see you to-morrow?” he asked, with a desire to hurt her, and flicking with his stick at the gorse.

“Not this afternoon?”

“I’ve got an engagement, with a friend of mine.”

“I thought you hadn’t got any friends?”

“Oh yes, I have several. Shall I see you to-morrow?” She looked at him levelly.

“You are just trying to annoy me, I believe. You say you want love, which I can’t give you, but I can give you friendship and sympathy, but you just keep me at a distance.”

He continued to swing aimlessly with his stick, and said nothing. He felt a sweet pang at her distress, and joyed in his obvious mastery.

Her face was inscrutable, but the eyes were filled with hurt gentleness. He ceased the aimless swipes at the gorse and waited for her to speak, but she turned away and was gone.

William watched her till she disappeared round the lane, and walked back to Brakspears St. Flammea. The street was filled with the smell of boiled cabbages. He passed along it towards Thistlecot. Halfway a tall figure detached itself from a crumbling cob wall and shuffled towards him. A grimy finger and thumb, both broken-nailed, went up to the bowler.

"Ullo, midear! You'm lukiing hottish!"

"I am, Brownie. Sorry I'm late."

"Bin swummun, zur?"

"Yes, Brownie."

"Aiy, aiy!"

With this remark he followed his guest into the cottage, keeping on his head the bowler. His wife began to fuss round the deal table, whereon was a large and steaming pudding, and a huge jug of foaming ale, which Brownie eyed approvingly. The shining cheeks of Brownie's Welsh wife glowed as he said:

"What a lovely pudding, Mrs. Brown!"

She touched the plates with a duster, gave a final proud glance at the young gennulmun, and then went out-doors to a shed at the bottom of the garden, where under pain of a girt beating her small children were herded together in silence, not listening to the eldest daughter Megan reading from the Bible.

"Make no whisper," she warned them; "the young gennulmun be dining with dad."

Inside, William and Brownie were eating with considerable noise, and soon the pudding had vanished and the foam on the brown ale had sunk lower in the jug.

"They say romance is dead, Brownie."

"Be ee?"

"You know what romance is, don't you, Brownie?"

"Surenuff I do."

"What is it, then?"

Brownie winked solemnly his one eye, and opened his mouth. William watched a small spider spinning a web on his bowler, and murmured:

"I wish she were not quite so beautiful. Gray eyes—the colour of genius."

“Aiy, her be a tidy maid, zur.”

“Do you know what an ideal is, Brownie?”

“Noomye, onless it be ruddle maid!”

After which remark he chuckled to himself; it were worth repeating to the missis! Young gennulmun had a rare wit, but he, Ole Broonie, had quite as rare a wit, surenuff!

CHAPTER VII

THE SOLITARY POPPY

HE passed the afternoon playing with Brownie's children, consenting to chase them and to be called, with shrill laughter, Old Granfer Dawbake, until Mrs. Brown reproved them for using such a scandalous word in the gennulmun's presence. Then he talked with Megan, while she listened to every word, constantly telling the children to be quiet, then turning to listen to him. Soon he left and went down to Rats' Castle and tried to read his favourite poets, but his mind would wander, so he put them back on the shelf, and went outside. The golden tranquility of the cove no longer sufficed him. Even the sight of the peregrine falcons sweeping at great speed from over the sea did not thrill him. He watched them until one dived, and the other swung still, a mere speck, above. The waiting bird fell, and William wondered as they disappeared behind the line of the hill what life had been shattered; then his thought returned to Mrs. Fairfax. He threw aimlessly a few pebbles into the water, and although the puppies waited bright-eyed for more, he disregarded them. He stared unseeing at the water, hesitated, then decided to go over to Cryde Bay. Up the hill path through the bracken he went, sometimes breaking into a run. He was impatient of his tardy progress, and longed for a horse to carry him at break-

neck speed across the headland. An hour shone away, and at last he was going down the pathway, through the lispings corn and so to the shore. At first he waited confidently for her to come to him, knowing that he was to be seen from her window in the cottage. In his mind he saw her peering eagerly between the white curtains, followed her as she rushed frantically to her bedroom, where she would tidy her hair, add an alluring and deliberate poppy-smear to her lips, and then stroll towards him, affecting surprise at the encounter.

But the afternoon went on, and she did not come. He went down to the rocks to pass the time, meditated on the myriad life there—the shrimps and prawns, the crustaceans, anemones and seaplants. Idly he plucked horse-winkles and pitched them in a pool, continuing this until a sharp sting on his ankle made him aware of a sand-flea contentedly prospecting for blood. He killed it, and arose from the sharp pinnacle of rock that was slowly numbing him. A scanning of the few beach idlers showed at once that she was not there. About a dozen people were lounging near, and dogs were barking for stones to be thrown into the surf. He tried to make his pups retrieve sticks, and while he was doing this he suddenly saw her quite near him, with a man, dressed in a dark blue flannel coat and white flannel trousers and brown buckskin shoes. The man sauntered along with his hands in his trouser pockets. Watching them, he felt a loneliness, and a return of sadness akin to that felt after the Armistice, when the spirit of comradeship was changed in the squadron mess; when friends, who had carelessly and happily been such, were demobilized, and there had been nothing to take their place. The happy circle round the stove in the ante-room after mess

dinner was broken up: nobody seemed to want to drink any longer hot whisky and water, with lemon in it: the wassailous spirit of comradeship had gone for ever. Himself had never been so lonely as when he left to be demobilized, and had gone home to his village to brood on the bitter changes that war had wrought; and in despair he had taken a train to the remote West Country, there to reject altogether the civilization that was worse than barbarism—since it chained a man to slavery in its factories and towns, and as compensation released him so that he might mutilate or be mutilated in order to save that civilization.

Billjohn and Tatters, who had been chasing footprints round the rocks, rushed towards her: she was bending down to caress them: she was looking his way: she was waving her hand. William cleared his throat, and hitched up his shabby grey trousers. He felt bashful, and earnestly prayed he would not make a fool of himself. Eveline, he could imagine from her attitude, was swiftly telling her companion about himself. Now he was near enough to see his face, he took an immediate dislike to him. When he looked at Eveline he felt as though something in his breast were fluttering to escape, becoming imprisoned in his throat.

“Hullo, Bill! I thought it was you. Do you know Captain Collyer? Pat, this is Mr. Maddison.”

They shook hands, and Captain Collyer said in a tired voice: “Hot, what?”

“Very,” replied William.

“Don’t be formal, you two,” laughed Eveline.

They both made a mirthless exclamation, and waited for her to speak.

“Isn’t it funny,” her gay voice said immediately, “that Pat and I should happen to meet in this out-

of-the-way spot? He motored here. Extraordinary how one runs across old friends, isn't it? Indeed, he nearly ran me over in the other sense."

"I don't think I've got any old friends," mumbled William, immediately considering it an idiotic thing to say, and hating himself.

His glance met hers—a sweet glance of sympathy. "Now, don't become melancholy," she whispered.

Captain Patrick Collyer continued to say nothing, and to avoid looking at William. Easily he sauntered along, hatless, hands in trouser pockets. His forehead was exceedingly high, his head was big, he had the blue eyes of a girl, a feminine mouth, and a delicate complexion; he looked slightly sulky, as one always accustomed to attention and a little wearied by it. William imagined that he danced perfectly, that he drove his car at great speed and steered with one negligently gloved hand, and that under no circumstances would he appear ill-at-ease.

"Pat swam right through the Claw this morning, Bill. I told him he would be drowned. He came all the way from London, straight from a dance at the Ritz, leaving at dawn. He's staying with friends at Ilfracombe."

"You must have travelled very fast," said William.

Captain Collyer continued to look on the sand. William envied his air of nonchalance as he drawled,

"I've got a rather fast bus."

"What is it?"

"What make, you mean? Oh, my own design."

"Has it a powerful engine?" William suggested.

"Useful. Eight cylinder. Two hundred b.h.p. She'd lap at about a hundred and twenty on Brooklands, I expect."

"You'll come and have tea with me?" asked Eveline.

"I must get back, thank you," William replied.

"Oh, n-no. Please, you'll have tea with me?"

"Yes, I would l-like to," he stammered, and she laughed delightedly, thinking that he was mocking her.

Captain Collyer strolled on in front. His face showed a languid indifference. At the door of the house he waited for them. She led them into the cottage where she was staying, a whitewashed building called Stalewell House. The three puppies wandered round the floor, sniffing the wainscotting for mice.

"Bill lives all alone in a cottage over the hills," she said to Captain Collyer; "that would hardly suit you, would it? You'd feel lost without Shiggles to shave you, wouldn't you? I suppose you've still got the old fellow?"

Captain Collyer raised his eyebrows and nodded slowly.

"Shiggles is the most curious servant in the world, Bill. He is over seventy, and just like a bull moose. Pat saved him from a bear in Canada, and ever since Shiggles has devoted his life to him. When Pat was shot down over his own 'drome Shiggles wanted to go up and meet the Hun himself. Tell him about it, Pat."

"My dear lady, why bore him?"

"Well, if you won't tell him, I will. Pat, I may tell you, Billy, has brought down forty-seven Huns. He got the second bar to his D.S.O. for——"

"Really, Lina, it's hard on a fellow to have his past raked up."

"I shall say what I like about you. Oh, all right, if you would rather I didn't. I'm glad someone is

sociable. Well, Billy—oh, here's Mrs. Shrake with tea."

"Have you heard from Lionel lately?" he heard Captain Collyer drawling, and immediately speculated upon the identity of Lionel.

"Not lately," she answered immediately: "the mail is not due till next Wednesday, and I rather expect to hear about his leave. He is expecting it, I know. Lionel is my husband," she said to William. "I didn't tell you I was married, did I?"

"I think you did, Lina?" he queried flippantly.

"Oh, did I? Sometimes I forget that I've got a husband. I don't wear a ring, you see. It is the nature of seawater, you know, to make the fingers shrink."

"Yes, blame the nature of seawater," drawled Captain Collyer.

"You satirical beast!"

"Ambiguity, not satire, Lina. My wit, like your temperament, is essentially adaptable."

"Subtle man! But are you shocked at me for not displaying my badge of conjugality, William?"

"Why should anyone be shocked in an age when we all please ourselves?"

"Oh, do we? You seem to be worldly wise all of a sudden, William. But you mustn't put ideas in my head."

He assumed what he hoped was a flippant air in order to hide the depression that he felt within him. The girl whom only that morning he had distressed by his sadness, pained by his indifference, made miserable by his cruelty, now was quite changed. He felt that she was a stranger to him. He tried to conceal his thoughts by an affectation of amusement, but it was a weak effort. Glancing at her, he saw that she

was contemplating him with a frank wistfulness: she half closed her eyes, tilted her head slightly and gave him a deliberately tender glance. The depression became heavier, and he tried to show in his eyes how hurt and puzzled he was by the presence of Captain Collyer.

"Let's have a bathe," she suggested, after tea; "only, Pat, you mustn't be reckless."

"I am *never* reckless," Captain Collyer protested as they went out. He returned to his car, standing in the lane, to get a bathing dress, and as soon as he was gone Eveline said tensely:

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter, Mrs. Fairfax."

"Why are you so strange? You bewilder me. One moment you are gentle and like a sweet child, and then you become cold and distant. Why is it? What have I done?"

"You have done nothing."

"Is it because Pat is here?"

He did not answer, but turned away his head.

"I thought so! Oh, you child, do you know what that implies? Listen. There is no time now to tell you the whole circumstances, but Pat is one of the nicest boys in the world. Poor fellow, he was expelled from Eton, and had to go to Canada, just before the war. That manner of his is just a mask to the world. You would think to look at him that he was effeminate and a useless creature, wouldn't you? Yet he is one of the bravest of men, one who has had to restrain all his feelings, otherwise he never would have come through the war alive. That's why he appears without emotion."

He nodded sympathetically.

"And, Billy, why did you behave so to me this morning? It wasn't good form, was it, my dear? You made me miserable."

"I'm sorry, but I was hurt because——"

"What?"

"Oh, because you are Mrs. Fairfax," he exclaimed, red in the face.

She kicked a piece of wood softly. She seemed to be remembering something far away. And, looking suddenly at him, she observed in a voice of reflective resignation, "I was married when I was sixteen, Billy."

"And are you unhappy?" he asked earnestly, grasping her arm.

"I am not very happy," she said, her eyes on the ground.

"I am sorry I was beastly to you, Mrs. Fairfax."

"Dear boy, I understand. Pat will go back shortly, I expect, and then you must take me to your cottage, and we will have some lovely long talks. And you shall read Shelley to me!"

"Will you really come?" he asked eagerly.

"My dear, I am so looking forward to it. You must show me those peregrine falcons of yours, and the seal, and Isaak the otter, and Jerry, and poor old Grannie!"

"You haven't forgotten their names?"

"Why, no! I've been thinking of you every minute since we met, thinking of you alone with your old birds! I wrote a long letter, too. . . ."

"I say, give it to me."

"No, it is such a foolish letter. I wrote it because I could not sleep. Oh, when you spoke at the stile about the beauty in life, and told me your thoughts, my heart was weeping, weeping for your spiritual distress. I could understand so well how the war hurt

you, the mental suffering, I mean, and the needlessness of it all, and how you were struggling to reconcile your vision with reality. That is why I left you: you made me feel so petty and useless, and though I wanted to help you, I could see no way. Don't worry, my dear . . . things will come all right in time. . . . Here's Pat coming back. Hush, do not talk about these things with him: he would not understand. We can talk when he goes. Now be a good boy and make friends. Hullo, Pat! What a time you've been! Billy and I have been talking about the war—at least, I was talking!”

“What, again! My dear Mrs. Fairfax!”

“Yes, again! My dear Captain Born Tired!”

She squeezed his arm, laughing into his face. William, making an excuse to find his dogs, went away and kept away. Eveline did not appear to care whether he returned, so he climbed a sandhill, and moodily watched them bathing.

At last, when they were dressed, he rose and strolled down to them. Eveline came forward, and whispered,

“Jealous child!”

“I'm not,” he said.

“Yes, you are. Come and be sociable.”

“I think I will go back to the cottage.”

“Why?”

“I want to feed my friends.”

“Very well.”

“I think I'll go.”

“Very well.”

“Captain Collyer and you really do not want me. You and he are old friends—I am a stranger—I'll go. Thank you very much for the tea.”

Saying good-bye, he walked away, feeling a burn in

his throat. He did not pause till he reached the Corp-snout, and then he sat on the shrivelled pasturage of the hillcrest. By his side a poppy droiled in the sun, a burst of scarlet from the dried earth. It was the only wildflower that he could see, and, while other plants were withered, it seemed to find nurture for its untamed bloom. He snapped the flower from the stalk, and crushed the petals in his fingers; and then stared at it, wondering why he had broken the blossom that had been all-in-all for its seeds.

The moon that had been like the gold bill of a curlew grew fuller, and every evening he watched it rising. It was quiet above the valley as the roistering sun went home, and wearily the earth put up its shutters. No one came near William as in the bracken he sat, trying to find happiness in the song of evejars, the far high scream of racing swifts, and the antics of his pups. Soon the moon was for him a gold hulk adrift in the reefless night sky, dismasted and rudderless, yet its ghostly crew forever netting the stars. By the thorns and the stunted holly bushes a swarm of chafers boomed and flipped, and moths whirred in the brake ferns. "You'm luki'g woebegone, midear," said Brownie when one night, unable to contain his melancholy, he went to the Nightcrow Inn.

"'Tis the hottish weather, zur. It be tarrible for all things. They do tell of going wi' guns to shoot the worriting shaepdog. It bant no dog; reckons it be a Doone ghostie. Now, I do wish I'd Will'um Jan wi' me justanow. I zeed a bootiful rabbut. If I'd a dog I'd have shot un quick! What, be homewards a-ready to Rats' Castle, midear? Surenu'ff?" and the one eye regarded him tenderly. "My boys do talk bout ee all day, now. Gude-night, zur, gude-night!"

Children ceased their clamouring play of hide-and-seek in the drangs and gardens as he passed, murmuring tinily, "Mis'r Ma'sson," cottage wives smiled and said, "You'm a praper zstranger," and there was a silence after he passed. He felt himself to be a stranger, an outcast, his heart to be derelict like the gold hulk skylogged in the Exmoor vapours. A bottle-green dusk brimmed the valley. The wavelets of the cove no longer pealed the elfin bells: there was only the dirge of the sea. That evening he read *Bevis* while it seemed that his spirit was trying to tear itself from his body to join that of Jefferies which had wandered round the shores of the New Sea, which had fished near the island Serendib, which had sailed the blue boat *Pinta*, and tacked into the wind while the ripples went *sock, sock* against its bows.

How Jack and I used to pore over this book, he thought. We, too, made a hut on Heron's Plume Island, we, too, had a battle. Never again can that happen. Jack, Jack, if you were only with me!

The printed page became blurred, and the book slid to the floor. Billjohn whined at his knees. Tatters and Hereward were out hunting milkydashels, but, hearing their mate's whine, back they came, tumbling through the circular hole at the bottom of the door. Around the god they leapt, rolling with him on the floor, whining and gurgling, licking his face, his bare ankles, his hands—telling him that they loved him, and would serve him always, whether he starved them, beat them, or cast them away.

CHAPTER VIII

SPELL BY THE WATER

BUT when the morning came they were around his pillow, snoring, on their backs with legs askew, but very warm and comforting. He threw off the blanket, and with it Becky and Pie, two cockroaches and a spider. He jumped down the stairs, and at the open door drank the cold sweet air of morning. A crab-green wave curled and crashed on the shingle: the sound awoke in him an ecstasy of living. Into the foamy water he plunged, and swam to a gray rock at the mouth of the cove, clambering to a natural seat. When the sun first filled the valley with light he swam in, and gave the animals their meal. They snarled and chattered, and stole food from one another's mouths. When all was finished, the puppies returned to the trousers and slept, Becky washed Pie, Isaak went off on a secret business, and Grannie Gordangle caught flies at the window. He smoked on the beach, and read aloud how a dying man had remembered the summers of his youth when he had been in love.

A sweet breath on the air, a soft warm hand in the touch of the sunshine, a glance in the gleam of the rippled waters, a whisper in the dance of the shadows.

There can never be summers again like those at home, when Big Will'um and Jim Holloman were in the mowing meadows, he thought.

The ethereal haze lifted the heavy oaks and they were buoyant on the mead, the rugged bark was chastened and no longer rough, each slender flower beneath them again refined. There was a presence everywhere, though unseen: on the open hills, and not shut out under the dark pines.

And there was Dolly, turning the swathes with the other girls, who went to the Witch pool at evening to dip, he sighed.

Let not the eyes grow dim, look not back but forward: the soul must uphold itself like the sun.

I wonder where Bill Nye is, and what he is doing. Granmer Nye must be dead, and old Bob Lewis, too. Change everywhere, bitter change.

In the blackbird's melody one note is mine: in the dance of the leaf shadows the formed maze is for me, though the motion is theirs: the flowers with a thousand faces have collected the kisses of the morning.

"I suppose Eveline has forgotten me," he said aloud to Grannie Gordangle: "I cannot read, I cannot think, I only want to be with her. She was so sweet to me, and she understands. Captain Collyer must be much more companionable than myself. I have known her

but a week, and yet everything is changed. I wish Jack o' Rags could speak, so that I could tell him about it."

The zany was emerging from his underground home in the hillside opposite the cottage, yawning and stretching his arms. William walked over to him, calling out a greeting. He did not answer, but stared at him dazedly. Bits of his brackeny bed were in his hair and beard, and the mouldy coat he wore was fastened by thorns; the hair on his face and chest was tumbled and black as a shot crow's wing.

"Have you been sleeping?" asked William in a loud voice. Jack o' Rags said "Look," lifted up his right leg and showed him a wound just above the boot.

"Take off your boot," he ordered. "Boot—boot," tapping it with his stick and pretending to remove his own. Jack o' Rags sat down and wrenched it off. His foot was brown with dried blood. He examined the lacerations on the leg and wondered what could have caused them. It was as though a fierce animal had bitten the limb. On each side of the bone were three suppurating patches. The top of the boot was gashed.

He had been bitten by the sheep-worrying dog, mused William as he peered at it, and yet these marks are too big for a dog's teeth. I wonder if there is some wild beast escaped from a show somewhere—a jaguar, or perhaps a leopard. By jove, this is exciting.

"Who did it?" He knew as he spoke that the question was unavailing; Jack o' Rags replied with his single word.

"Look," said he, pointing to his leg, and, like a child who has pronounced a new word, he repeated, "Look—look—look."

“Dog bite your leg?”

“Look—look.”

He made the noise of big dogs baying *Wough-wough*. The zany sprang up and glared about him. The puppies disturbed by the noise started to yapp, and with a leaping movement Jack o' Rags disappeared into the dark red tunnel.

“Lie down,” William ordered the puppies; “don't make that stupid row for nothing. OUTSIDE!”

They rushed away and played on the shingle. There was a harsh scream, and Jerry the jay flew to his shoulder. Thinking that it meant more food, Diogenes came down the goyal, and Grannie Gordangle with him. The seagull gabbled in the doorway of Rats' Castle demanding that he should have his share. They went away on realizing that he had nothing for them.

He stood at the cave hole and called “Look” several times. A bright lizard-green moss grew on the stones, and a cow's skull lay at his feet.

“Look!” he called.

A shuffling came from the cold gloom, and Jack o' Rags appeared. He spoke to him and led him by the arm into the light. They continued the conversation with the single word. When they came to Rats' Castle, William pushed him gently so that he sat down on the threshold.

He boiled a kettle, and was tearing some linen into strips when Jack o' Rags growled in a deep voice,

“Look—look—look.”

William went to him, wondering what new discovery the zany had made, since his altered voice presaged the unusual.

“Look,” he said again, and William looked.

At the same time Eveline from the hillpath waved

both her arms, and a musical cry like that of a Tyrolese goatherd echoed in the valley.

"Look," said Jack o' Rags.

William breathed deeply, and his heart beat violently.

"Hullo," was all he said when she was near.

"Hullo, Lord Tornsox," she called as she crossed the shell beach. "Why haven't you been over?"

"Oh, I've been mucking about here."

"I've been alone an awful lot, and have been fishing most days with old Muggy—lobsters and crabs. He is a dear old chap. Such sport. And I've been so worried. My poor little Jonquil has had influenza. I nearly went off to Findlestone to see her, but it wasn't serious."

"Who's Jonquil? It's a lovely name."

"I am so glad you like it. Jonquil is my little daughter!"

"Your daughter?"

"Yes, my daughter! Don't look so startled! Didn't you think I was old enough? And how are you?" turning to Jack o' Rags, and smiling.

"He can't speak. I'm just going to do his foot."

"The poor dear: his foot looks bad. Who is he? Can he understand what one is saying?"

"No."

"W-William, you amaze me more every minute. What an extraordinary thing you are. You never mentioned that you had a lodger."

"I haven't. Jack o' Rags lives in the mine over there."

"Good heavings. What a weird crowd you are!"

"He's been bitten by something, I think."

"I should think he has! Let me dress his leg for

him. I know all about nursing. You can't use that rag—it would give him blood poisoning. Have you any iodine?"

"No, but I've got some boric powder."

"That's better than nothing. I'll wash it for him, if he won't object. Doesn't he stare at me? Poor old fellow, he ought to be in a hospital. How does he live?"

"On berries and rabbits."

"Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday! Hullo, is that Isaak? He doesn't like me—hark at that snarling chatter. What a lovely creature—look at his brown rudder! Oh, the darling's only got three pads. How sweet of you to nurse these poor broken things. And no one nurses you, who n-need tenderness so much." Her lip trembled, and she turned her head. "May I go inside and see your cottage, please?"

"Do, please."

"Oh, what a mess everything is in! You poor thing."

She spoke as though the sight of disarrangement within was hurtful to her. He felt that her compassion was for himself, as she moved quickly round the room, gazing at his books, reading the titles aloud, touching them, putting them in order.

"My dear, how damp they are. Look at the mildew."

"I know, Lina."

"How did you know I am called Lina?"

"Collyer called you Lina, so I thought I would."

"Of course."

"May I call you that, please?"

"Why, certainly. And yet—I like your grave pronunciation of my name. No, you must not call me Lina—everyone calls me that. Call me Eve."

"Thank you. Eve, I am so glad you have come to see my cottage."

"Are you, really?" she asked, with relief.

"I cannot tell you how glad. I have missed you—but I should not say that. But, you know, it is a poor place to invite anyone to."

"It isn't—it's—— Your socks, my dear: they are not mended. Don't you get blisters?" She looked into his face. "But, first, we must attend to Man Friday. See how he stares at me."

He was sent upstairs for the boric powder, while with sleeves rolled up she scoured the basin with sand, and washed the linen. All the while she spoke to him, her lips dewy with smile, her glance always tender. She knelt before Jack o' Rags, and with firm hands bathed the wounds, then frowningly inspected them, after which she asked for a knife. At her bidding he purified the blade in the ember-flames of the wood fire, and when it was cooled she with swift gentleness cleansed the hurt. The water became stained, and he shuddered, but Jack o' Rags did not wince. Now she was laving the bony leg, and the zany was touching her auburn hair in wonderment and gratitude.

"Look—look," he said, smoothing it.

She smiled as though she was pleased, and he realized with pain that all men must surely be drawn to her, because she was gracious to even the least among them.

When his leg was bandaged Jack o' Rags stood on the threshold.

"And now I must attend to you," she told him. "You must work under my command. And before I can issue orders I must inspect the entire place. Lead on, O minister to the sick."

"Upstairs?"

"Yes."

"But it is so untidy."

"I am prepared for disorder."

"You will get a shock."

"That will be stimulating. Lead on, W-Will'um the Birdboy."

He lifted the latch and she passed up the stairs. The first room was small, and contained a table and chair. A pen and ink and papers were scattered on the table. A tiny window permitted light to enter and show the desolation of the place. One corner of the ceiling had fallen in, or rather on a previous occasion William, crawling over the laths in order to find swifts' nests, had suddenly gone through the plaster, to the surprise of himself and two rats who had been exploring his kit during his absence. Spiders' webs were spun in the corners and ruined with wood-dust which trickled from the holes at every mousepeep. Eveline made many exclamations when she saw the state of his bedroom, and immediately ordered the blankets and mattress of his bed to be thrown outside in the sun. She said that his coats hanging upon nails around the walls were damp and the delight of moths. She exclaimed at the swallows' nest upon the beam, and took the broom pretending to knock it down, but with an anguished cry he restrained her, explaining afterwards he was, of course, foolish, but that he loved the swallows. Looking merrily at him, she said that it was unhealthy to have animals and birds sleeping in the same room, although in other and less intimate ways they might compensate for lack of human friends. He flung the coats through the window with such force

that she stopped sweeping and laughed at him. He pretended to be hurt by her merriment, and was disappointed when she appeared to disregard it.

She worked very hard, scrubbing the floor when it had been swept. "You must strip off all those newspapers, and get some limewash," she suggested, pausing to read the date of a sheet that was stuck over a crack. "*The North Devon Herald*, 17 December, 1899—they talk about the War. That must be the Boer War. It has been stuck there a long time. Vile print. You must tear all this down." He protested that he liked it there, as it belonged to a past age and gave him a feeling of awe whenever he glanced at it. She laughed again, and said he was a proper old granfer, but said it so softly that it made him happy.

"At any rate I am some good," she reflected, when by her energy the bedroom was clean and orderly.

"What do you think of me as a skivvy, my lord Tornsox? Not very much. Well, I used to be one in a Castle, once! Now, if you give me your socks I will go downstairs and darn them. Come on, take 'em off. Well, what does that matter? While I am darning you can change your trousers and I will patch that little rent in them. How surprised you look! Didn't you know that they were torn in two places? Now I've made the sensitive child go quite red in the face. And that reminds me, I saw a rare flower this morning that will interest you, the Scarlet Cranesbill. It was growing by a stone heap near Cryde Bay. And I remembered it from an illustration in a little book I used to love when I was a child: a sort of wild geranium. I thought that you would like to hear of it. Such a sweet flower. I picked it, but it fell out of my pocket as I was crossing the Corpsnout. You don't

think it improper of me to sit on the bedstead of a young bachelor's establishment? At least I suppose it was once a bedstead, although now it looks more like an ancient harp stolen off an old-iron heap than a bed. It's quite rusted through, W-William! Oh, I'm so happy, happy. Excuse this tomfoolery, but I feel that I must bubble on in my nonsense or go mad. I want to laugh and dance, and sing and shout! W-William, if you look so solemn I shall knock your eye out! Your shirt is undone. Come here, and I'll sew a button on for you."

He shifted on the framework.

"Come on!"

As he did not answer, she asked him if he felt shy.

"Oh, no."

"Yes, you are!"

He did not say again that it was not shyness. On the ceiling of that small room were gliding the yellow ripples thrown up from the sea. He had a feeling of delightful fear, because her voice was altered, and she was looking at his eyes, and he did not turn to her gaze. He liked to see her disturbed by his simulated indifference. A leisured song of blackbird came down the valley, and the summer wavelets shook the shells of the cove.

"Why do you mock me?" she breathed.

He looked on the floor and tried to think of an answer.

"I don't, really, Mrs. Fairfax."

"You do. Often there is fear in your eyes. Because I'm married, I suppose?"

"Yes, your glittering ring makes my eyes ache!"

"You avoid any direct statement by your crude jokes!"

"But, honestly, I like you," he said.

"Oh, you like me, do you? All-men-are-brothers-sort-of-idea, I suppose? I believe you care more for a swallow than for a human being."

"No, it is more than that," he replied, his voice suddenly flat.

"I don't understand."

He sighed: thus was his dream esteemed and its worth dismissed.

"You are polite certainly; I wish you were not. I believe in your heart you despise me for coming over. Since you left on Sunday I have been made miserable by you, you who care not if you never see me again." She seized his left hand, and said that she wanted to hurt him, to be cruel to him, to make him suffer, because he scorned her for trying to help him. His thumb was bent back, and although the pain was sharp he did not move, but said,

"Break my thumb if you want to, Mrs. Fairfax."

She flung away his hand and told him to leave her, that she despised and hated him. He got up and went to the stairs, but she called his name, and he turned and saw tears on her lashes.

"Oh, I am sorry; truly I am. I am half wanton still, you see, and I was really trying to be decent. But your indifference is a w-wound to me!"

At this confession he remained silent, waiting with a feeling of fascination to hear what she would say next.

When after awhile she said nothing he returned slowly to her side and touched her hair. She looked up at him, and he saw that her eyes were wet. With a feeling of shame he realized that she was being abso-

lutely natural. He wanted to comfort her, but he dared not.

"I am going to cook your lunch for you," she said.

Afterwards they collected the coats and blankets. It was necessary first to shake off Billjohn, Hereward, Tatters, Becky, Pie and any of their straying dependents. He suggested a walk to the pine woods beyond the hamlet. In a dream of soft valley sunshine he walked with her, while magpies scolded their approach from afar, and the voice of a turtle dove throbbed with love in the thorn brakes. She was like a child ecstatic with wonderment as he told her the names of wild birds that sprang up from bracken and tussock at their passing, clapping her hands with delight and her eyes shining joyously. But a moment seemed the walk up the path, and then they were in the thatched and lime-washed hamlet, stroking every grimalkin on garden wall, and speaking to housewives who craned round doorways and greeted them while covertly wiping hands on aprons. Proudly he walked by her side through Brakspears St. Flammea, until they came to fields red with poppies asway in the windy corn, where they rested and talked intimately of things light as the wings of honey-flies darting about the taller flowers of scabious.

They wandered over parched fields to a quiet valley of sapling oak and cone-bearing trees, over which in sunny wind three buzzards were soaring. Pigeons clattered away through dense large twigs as they went beside a stream, the sunlight making white the marks on their blue necks. A herd of wild red deer trotted up the steep hill as soon as the wind brought human scent to their nostrils; there was a stag with growing antlers, and three hinds, each with a tiny calf

and a pricket. Hand in hand they watched them bounding among the trees, and then went on till they came to cool beech trees where in dancing light and shade they rested beside a well fringed with water-hemlock and brooklime. Coloured chips of stones were clear in the light-laden water.

"This is the well of St. Flammea," he told her, "and it is legend that a knight crept here when wounded and his blood dripped into the pool. His lady found him as he was dying, and he told her that his spirit would go into the ground and rise with the spring. He was a bard, and her brother had waylaid him in the wood and had him stabbed by assassins. So this water never ceases to flow, like the poetry of the earth."

"And what did his lady do?"

"When he died she held her face under the water and was found drowned with him. That is the story of St. Flammea, as afterwards the knight was called."

"I wonder if it is true?"

"I think so. That is how the village got its name. Sir Flammea was probably a great man at the jousts, and became famous as a lance-breaker. That might in time become Brakspear, and as his spirit is in the water he became a saint."

"Do you think that anyone's spirit could be in water?"

"Who knows? Why shouldn't it be?"

"But you assume that there is a spirit? A friend of mine, Lord Spreycombe, once told me that religion was based upon fable. How do you know you have a soul?"

"It is your spirit that shines in you now. I cannot see it. But because I cannot see it is no proof that it isn't there. Reason tells me I am a spirit, just as

reason tells me that one of those little coloured stones on the bed of the well is matter. The two are utterly apart. My body is matter. My body and my spirit are different things, blended temporarily."

"I wonder if this water would ever cease to well," murmured Eveline, regarding her own image in the water.

"Not even in the longest drought. It flows for ever, coming from the purity of the earth. As this water, the life-giving water, wells up, so does the goodness, or the poetry, or the desire to be beautiful and to be calm—whichever term you prefer—rise in man's soul. If this well be choked, the water will rise elsewhere. Keats knew that when he said that 'the poetry of the earth is ceasing never.'"

She sniffed, and turned away.

"What's the matter, Eve?"

She said with flippant tenderness, in order not to hurt him, "I don't want you to talk about Keats. I want you to talk about us. I can see your eyes in the water, so big and solemn, W-will-yum!"

"And I can see yours."

"What are those sweet blue flowers?"

"Brooklime."

"They are like the wondering eyes of a child. My Jonquil has eyes like that."

"And Jonquil's mother has eyes that are the colour of the little wild gray wood dove."

A willow wren sang of summer among the cones, and afar, but distinctly heard, a pheasant was disturbing the afternoon calm with his hoarse crowing. The hum of insects formed a slumbrous undertone in the tranquil larch forest, while goldcrests flitted along their verdant roadways above.

A spider threw an airy line, which touched his face. A slight contact; she brushed it away. Another gleaming thread floated by.

"Did you feel it?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I feel that I am being bound by a million such threads. The glance of an eye, a shy smile, a thought of beauty that echoes in my heart, a kindness done to me."

He did not know what he should reply.

She said no more, but her hand sought his, and clasped it. The willow wren still piped away golden minutes. He felt her hair against his cheek, and wanted to put his lips to it. He was going to speak, when Eveline said:

"I have a confession to make. You will loathe me, but I cannot go on any more unless I tell you."

He felt a sick fear within him.

"What is it?"

"Do you remember when I first met you?"

"Yes."

"We talked about poetry."

"Yes."

"Well, I told a lie. I said that I had read some poet or other. It was a lie. I feel so mean."

"Why?"

"Because I was a hypocrite. And you are so sincere! I never saw anything in poetry until I met you. That is the truth. Do you hate me?"

"How could I do that?" he said, looking into her eyes.

"You are sweet to me," she whispered, pressing his fingers.

"It is of no importance," he said. "I think you live poetry, while I—I just dream."

"But I am bad."

"Silly!"

"But I am. Perhaps I learned too quickly and falsely in the war, like many another. And fancy, at twenty-three I've got a child who is five years of age. She's got a rotter for a mother."

A tear trilled down her cheek, and it fell into the water and was lost, but tiny ripples spread across to the petals of the brooklime.

"Don't cry, Mrs. Fairfax," whispered William, "don't cry any more. Of course, I understand you. Don't cry, Eveline."

He put his arm around her shoulders and hugged her timidly, whispering that she was good, and laying his own hot cheek against the cold tears. Soon she was smiling at him with misted eyes, and confessing that she was an idiotic person to weep, because it made her eyes red.

CHAPTER IX

DOG DAYS

SINCE swallow-time of that year the fierce sunlight had pressed upon the land, drying up the dewponds and the hill springs. As the drought increased so was more misery made for the sheep. Old Voley the shepherd began to look haggard; not only was the loss to his master heavy, but he had a love for the animals at whose birth he had watched. All day long their pitiful cries quavered into the heated air. Whenever he appeared on the down, a gaunt greybeard riding bareback and bridleless his tamed Exmoor pony, they greeted him with thin bleats and came towards him. On the hard brown ground their feet made a dry rattle. Voley grunted as he surveyed them. He and his mate worked from the first light, dipping them in wash troughs to kill the eggs of blowflies. During May the farmer had decided to sink a well upon Brakspear Down, and the landlord of the Nightcrow Inn still worked at it during the day with his nephew from Cryde. With ruddle-smearred arms and shoulders they hewed the solid rock, working with crowbar, sledgehammer, and blasting powder. After two months' work they had excavated thirty-two feet, but no water had been found, in spite of the repeated twisting of hazel forks which they declared an indication of a stream beneath.

Winged insects increased as the sun swept up to the

zenith. In the sunken lanes hid the horse flies that rose silently to draw blood whenever man or beast passed by. Eveline and William carried a whisk of twigs to beat them away. They came unbeknown and settled on the neck or the wrist, until a sharp sting betrayed them. Often she pretended that one was on his back, giving him a vigorous beating, laughing while she did so at his protests.

Every morning they met on the Corpsnout, and wandered down to the sands, or to Sealion Cove. Never a sad thought came into William's mind; his eyes were merry, he was strong and lithe; he talked quickly and bubbles of humour and laughter rose all day to his lips. He sang songs, and played the buffoon for no reason at all. He delighted in seeing her eyes, and often would ask her to look at him, so that he could dwell upon their brightness. He told her during lazy hours how he had pined throughout the war for the love and companionship of women, and how he had longed to go to his village: and being there, how restless and miserable he had been.

"Where is your home?" she asked once.

"Near Colham—a place called Rookhurst."

She seemed astonished, looked intently at him, laughed quietly to herself, seemed about to say something, hesitated, then changed the subject and asked if he had ever been in love.

"I thought I was once. I remember that she used to insist that I had an unhealthy mind, because I felt most deeply the things that never troubled her—the migration of birds, for instance. Of course, I see now how fatal any union between us would have been. For me, it was an attraction of like for unlike, and that is a very strong one. But it cannot last. Perhaps unions

were not meant by Nature to be permanent. Marriage," he said with a wise air, "is only made durable by links of taste—if one has enthusiasms in common, they usually last, whereas the links of mutual attraction don't. If only Keats could have outgrown his love for Fanny Brawne—if only he had been well—what things he would have done!"

She asked to be told about that immortal tragedy of love unrequited, and he told her.

"I believe I must be a sort of Fanny Brawne," she said wistfully, when his voice was silent, "although a man once called me 'Dolores'—what an awful compliment."

"You're like Madeline in the 'Eve of St. Agnes.' "

A buzzard called *whee-oo* above them, and at the base of the precipice the tide whispered among the rocks. They had walked to the snout of the headland, pink with sea-thrift, and were sitting at the brink of the precipice, on the wild thyme and among the trembling feathers of seabirds. Lundy Island was half dissolved by an azurine mist lying over the calm sea that seemed after the sweltry light of day to have been bleached of its deep colour.

"There's Järrk the seal!" he pointed suddenly, excited as a boy, with sudden vivacity in his brown eyes.

A black head was thrust up in the water five hundred feet away. He stood up and shouted, but it did not stir. When its lungs were filled with air it turned, showing a sunsplash on its dark body, and disappeared. He turned to the south. From here could be seen the Santon Burrows behind a shallow coast which was broken by the wide estuary of the Taw, confluent near its mouth with the swift Torridge. Once he had toiled throughout a windy March day to reach the flats of

the river and to watch the wading birds. His footprints as he journeyed onwards, eager to reach the river, had trailed past the ribs of sailing craft long sunken in the sand. The dunes were covered with spike grass; territory occupied only by rabbits and stoats. Where the sandhills ceased a green and brown tract of land, divided by dykes and hedges, extended for many miles. There the wild swans flew with geese and duck, curlew, whimbrel, plover and sandpiper. At night a booming bittern fished in the dykes; by day the rare marsh harrier hunted rabbits and small birds. On the flat wastes were cattle shippen and linneys, so small when seen from Brakspear Down as to appear the size of the specks of stone. There was one large house, surrounded by trees. The Santon Mires had been claimed from the sea, which had ebbed from them centuries since. Under his hand he gazed at the estuary glistening like the track of a snail, seeing across it the water-side houses of Appledore nearly resolved into golden vapour and the sky.

"It is very beautiful here," her voice said dreamily.

A titlark in corant dive of joy fell behind them, in its bill a song-straw pulled from the sun.

"We are living like Immortals," he said.

"What is this little bone in the grass, Billy?"

She held out a tiny white fragment.

"It is the leg bone of a small bird, probably a finch."

"Poor little thing," said Eveline, "I wonder how it died?"

"Probably one of the peregrines caught it."

"Doesn't it seem sad that only this bone remains of a beautiful living thing, that used to sing and to flutter its wings, and love its mate? Isn't it a terrible thought that everything goes to dust, lips and hands, all, all to

dust—blown by the wind anywhere. O, I will not be buried in the ground.”

“ ‘With the carrion worm mining in the seat of intellect,’ ” he quoted.

“I cannot bear that thought.”

“Few people can. Only those who believe in the unchanging spirit can regard death with equanimity.”

“Don’t let us talk about such things.”

“ ‘Even if there be no immortality, at least I shall have had the glory of that thought,’ ” he quoted again.

“O Jeffries, my Jeffries!”

“Is that from the book you showed me?”

“Yes.”

“It also said that to-day is everything.”

“It is easy to believe, in this loveliness of air and sea and sky that to-day is everything,” he said.

“It is more than that to me.”

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t you feel that anything wonderful has come into your life?”

“I think so,” he said, looking at the sun sinking behind Lundy Island.

She said gently: “That means no. No, of course, you don’t regard me as I regard you. Why should you? Look at me, look at me, don’t turn away.” She was almost sad. As he would not look at her she stood up, and stared across the sea to the Santon Burrows.

“Oh, you do make me feel ashamed of myself,” she almost whimpered. “Nearly as ashamed as I felt weeks ago by the well.”

He did not move; and soon, as though tired of inaction, she rose and stood on the lip of the precipice.

“Be careful,” he cried aloud his anxiety.

"Oh, don't worry about me," she declared, walking away. He watched her disappear round the hunch of the promontory.

Afterwards he followed along the stony path to Cryde Bay, watching the packs of swifts that wheeled in the air, aloof from all other birds. They fled screaming, hunting their prey as they played. Martins flew in happy parties just above the cliff line, but there were no swallows. For years their numbers had been lessening. During April William had lamented the dwindled swallows; now he thought of them hardly at all.

She ignored him when he reached her. She sat by a hill stream, on a patch of yellow trefoil snapping the yellow flowers from their stalks.

"Don't do that, Eveline," he begged of her. She pulled a handful and flung it at him; there were tears in her eyes. He took her hand, pleading forgiveness. Her yielding humility made sweeter the reconciliation. The rich light of evening slipped away into dusk and moonlit peace. Till half-past eleven they wandered over quiet sands where ring-plovers called *tu-lip tu-lip* as they sped by the sea.

"To-morrow will be a full moon," she said as she bade him good-bye. "O, Willie Maddison, think what the sea will look like from the hill—you won't run up a beam away from me, will you?"

All the next day, as though overcome by the sun's furnace that seemed to fuse sea and sky into a candent blue puddle, they and the dogs lolled on the Vention sands, bathed in the pools and the sea. A swooning wind had been blowing off the land all day. They could hear the rattle of sheep's feet on the hard turf

of the hills as if they were near them, so distinct was sound in the shimmering air. In a valley miles inland the puffs of the Ilfracombe train were audible.

She wore her dark blue bathing dress, and her face and neck seemed untouched by the light and fire which burnt to a deep hue his face and limbs, and burnished his brown hair. He touched her knees and shoulders, asking her why they were brown and not her face. She replied, "That's a secret, William!" but afterward showed him a bottle which she said contained an old country recipe against sunburn, a lotion made from the blossom of elderberry, rose, and an essence of a corn-field flower called fumitory.

"My grannie told me years ago how to make it."

They sat with their backs to a grey rock on the hot, loose, white sand. Yellow flags were in bloom on a shelf of land twenty yards in front of them, where the paths led to the barley above the cliff. A band of swallows came down to the sands and sped twittering for awhile before returning to their nest under the sheds of the inland village. Tall green reeds on their left gave forth a gentle rustle as they moved their plumes and pennons. A steady roar came from the returning spring tide, but through the roar they could hear the cries of sheep on the hills above, and the petulant chattering wails of young kestrels from their eyrie among the thorn-brake. Beyond the reeds and the short slope above them an intense blue met the barley-hail stirring the edge of the sky. Spires of sorrel stretched up with thin grasses, where butterflies clung and rested. It was time for tea, and Eveline left him to get driftwood for the fire. Her bare feet on the loose sand made a musical, purring sound, and so bright was the light from the sky that her grey sun-shadow seemed to

shrink into the glistening specks. He observed her stooping to gather sticks, singing, happily absorbed in her task. She moved in simplicity as though passion and thought had never come to her, untroubled like the white gull gliding over the sea. He became eager to see her knees as she bent down, so rounded and smooth, and unlike his own, which were hard and bony. Her loose auburn hair fell over her shoulders and the powder-blue stuff of her dress. She smiled at him, and he saw her white teeth as she tossed back the tresses. He watched her, feeling suspended in the clear air whose colour was so pure and unsoiled.

A flock of daws and rooks flew high over the beach, wheeling in the warm air ascending, and circling and twirling and slipping past each other with cries of joy, and as he looked up they veered into the sun and were hid in blinding light. In roll and agitation they were through the radiance, and sailing down to their nesting ledges in the cliffs.

She came back with twigs and bits of fir-bark, a broken basket and several lumps of sea-coal. He made a fire between two boulders, and boiled a kettle filled from a trickle of spring-water among the rocks. She made tea in the kettle, and they drank out of the same cup, declaring that it was the nicest tea in the world. Scalded cream and raspberries they ate with a crusty cottage loaf, using flat stones for plates. They spoke in broken sentences, with nods and single words. Their thoughts were conveyed by a glance, a smile, a look.

After tea they dressed and sauntered to the line of the tide, climbing a rock and sitting together while the sea came swiftly over the sands and the waves broke below them. The sun was high in the west, the sea azure at the end of the headland, and in silver glitters

spread across to Lundy Island, which was consumed in shining mist. Five black spurs of rock were in the western silver path a quarter of a mile in front of them, the jagged outlines brazen as though heated almost to melting. Slowly the burning sea reduced the points, the waves threw spray over them, and a mist of steam arose. Against their own rock the rollers were crashing and seething, pouring off in cascade and waterfalls. The air was cool and fresh. She was splashed by a big ninth wave and pressed herself against him. A sunbow came out of the broken wave, gave them delight, and fled. He put his arm round her, and left it there long after the comber had beaten its strength away on the sands behind them. The lobe of her ear showed through her hair so loosely coiled, and he had a desire to fondle it with his teeth.

At sunset they scrambled along the rock and jumped off above the tide. Slowly they went along the sands and up through the dunes and over a wasteland where grew vipers' bugloss and tall mulleins among brambles and tufts of burnet rose, and so through the heather and ling to Brakspear Down, often turning in enchantment of the ocean seen from the high ground. On the horizon Lundy Island was grape-coloured, and rising baseless in a golden fume between sea and sky. Two mated buzzards were soaring in tranquil circles a mile above the world. In awed silence they sat and looked across the sea. They were alone with the wandering air and its birds. William's heart yearned for the meaning of beauty, wild emotion rushed to him as he thought of the everlasting loveliness that one day he must leave. His spirit said that It was immortal, that freed of earthly thrall It became merged into a

glory which forever irradiated matter, manifesting itself in bird and flower, in animal and man. From the germ or the seed It built Itself in the form of an intellect or a blossom, a soft coloured wing or a reedy note of song. Eveline cared nothing for the abstract. Her heart desired a perfection of life for herself, for a love completed and lasting; and these were only to be found in what to herself she called the ideal lover, whose every embrace would be as sweet as the first. Then the joy of service would ever be fresh, her beauty would ever be a wonder to bind him, so that in being supreme she would, and how joyously, make herself the slave.

Both felt a sadness that was almost an awe and reverence because in thought they faced the unknown, the inapprehensible. He thought with wild sadness, I want to go out to this beauty. She thought as tears brimmed in her eyes, I want something for myself in this beauty; I want to grasp it for myself, to take it into my heart. The woman turned to look at the man who would not heed her.

No word was spoken as with a sigh they turned from the luminous sea and walked through the heather and bracken. Ghost moths of summer drifted over the pathway as they brushed the ferns, and grasshoppers were singing on the ground. The moon would not lift its rim above the hills till the evejars had been reeling a long time. Slowly and in silence they crossed Brakspear Down. In the dusk the lighthouses upon Lundy Island were flashing their first white warning to mariners. Along the path they went, down the hill track, and into Rats' Castle. Their entry was greeted by cries for food.

At owl-light they left the cottage, and loitered on

the beach, smoking and watching the phosphorescence in the waves. She smoked her cigarette quickly, so that her cheek was frequently fired by the glow. Abruptly she flung it into the water: it hissed and died.

CHAPTER X

WHITEST WITCHERY

ABOVE the valley the stars were watchful and pale. Into the quiet night from the tower of St. Flammea's Church were rolled the passing hours. At eleven o'clock the afterglow of sunset was over the western ocean. From the hill they could see the dark spread of water that flowed round the far Corpsnout, and regularly from Hartland Point came a prick of fire, which increased to a glare of red, then shrank to an ember which went out and was followed by a white-gold beam flashing across Bideford Bay. Curlew and wading birds flighted from the estuary were calling on the shore, and somewhere in the heather wastes near them a rabbit screamed in a snapped gin. As they listened with the echo of pain in their hearts the cry ceased, there was a grunting noise, and the rattle of a chain.

Eveline clutched his arm in fear, and they remained still. Something was scratching at the ground, and the chain of the gin was rattled angrily. These noises gave way to that of a heavy body pushing clumsily through the undergrowth.

"It's probably Jack o' Rags," he whispered.

"I'm afraid."

"Don't move."

And now the east was distained by a yellow mist that floated before the moon and the bended ashtrees

against the sky formed a dark flagree. Although its arch was not yet risen the duskiness grew less, and was like a myriad grey and black atoms, whirling silently and sparkling lightlessly under the stars. They peered in the direction of the movement as it lessened, knowing that the thing had emerged from the heather and was crawling over the thistled grass. The thing was low on the ground. It was grey, like a shadow, and hard to discern. It moved like a dog nearer and nearer to them.

It smelt them, and stopped. Eveline made a slight exclamation, it rustled away swiftly, with the chain of the trap knocking against stones. He laughed.

"It's only a brock." He explained that the badger was more alarmed than they had been.

"I like that badger," said Eveline, laughing with relief, "he is a very decided person. If he's going to do anything wrong, he does it thoroughly. Fancy tearing up the trap as well! The height of impertinence! It's like eloping with another man's wife and taking his dog and kennel at the same time."

His mind was wandering again. He was thinking of one of his grooms, whose face had been bisected by a splinter of shell while he had been talking to him. William had gone to see the dead man's wife after the war in a Waterloo slum. He remembered her sad eyes; and the dog who still waited.

Eveline unlinked her arm. The arch of the moon was now above the earth, and stirred by its gleam a blackcap roosting in the bramble began to sing. The low notes were soft in the night lit by moon and stars and quenchless afterglow.

"I've made another coarse remark," she said miserably, "but it slipped out before I could check myself. I

saw humour in that animal's escapade, and as usual said the wrong thing. However, I am myself, as you once said of yourself. I wish I were not, sometimes. I feel your cold disapproval."

"No, Eveline. I was thinking of something else."

"Forgotten all about me?"

"Only for a second. How cool your hand is, Eve. I love your slender fingers. It's like holding Billjohn's paw."

"Warm heart, Billy. Your hand is c-cool, too." Her dulcet voice had the tone and stammer of a nightingale.

"But I have a cold heart."

"For me, yes."

"For everyone, I'm afraid."

"It will grow w-warm when you meet someone good."

"You," he whispered, but she seemed not to hear.

They sat in the heather and watched the moon. Their shoulders and their faces were near together. He drew away from her, so that he might watch the light on her face. How eager were her eyes and girlish, how sweet her lips, how his heart was filled with pain because the spirit of her beauty would never be his.

"Billy, what does it all mean—life, and my emotions and impulses? What does it lead to? Why do I seek love and never find it? What is it all for? What is God? O, we on earth are uncared for, wailing for light, but all is darkness."

"I will light a torch that all shall see," he thought, inspiring deeply the golden breath of the stars, and feeling the strength of the earth in his heart. He felt an impatience for the feebleness of her feeling, as she entered all things upon her own intimate sensations.

"All human ideas are vain, all hope is illusion, so what have we left to hold on to? Only love. And love

means passion. Passion is always sad—true passion, I mean. Why do men fall in love with me, why do they say things that stir me and draw me to them? Many men have said they loved me, but not one of them has loved the real *me*. They have loved, or thought they have loved, my beauty. But to them I can give nothing. Billy, the moonlight is in my head. I am being ruthlessly frank with you, because I feel that never again shall I meet one like yourself. And I pray that I don't shock you, for then you will have done with me."

He held her hand and patted it.

"Life is too much for me—it burns me up. I am like the earth under a drought: the life-giving sun surcharges me."

The clasp of her hand made him exclaim as he looked at her:

"And makes you beautiful, Eveline. I have never seen one so vitally alive as yourself. Your hair, your lips, your eyes!"

"Why do you l-look at me l-like that?" she asked in a fluttering, husky stammer; "w-why are you so s-strange?"

The moon was free of the earth and floating in the sky.

"It is like an old spade guinea," he said.

She hid her face in her lap, and clasped her knees with her hands. An evejar reeled its song on a dead elderberry near them, flew away, returned, sang again, and flew away; the moon rose up. At last he asked her if she were cold.

"No," she said.

"Tell me, Eve?" he begged.

"Unhappy," she whispered.

He put his left arm round her shoulder, hugging her

close, feeling as though they were two discarnate beings. Her white wool jersey was very thin, and the shoulder was soft. He lifted her face and turned it to him. The gleam from the thin worn coin was reflected in a tear as it rolled down her cheek.

The bubbling songs of many evejars were now linked around them. A woodowl hooted on the slopes below. The sea rippled away in the moonlight to the night's infinity.

With his hand he stroked back the hair from her forehead. He touched the white brow, the warm throat. He smoothed the cheek with his own. The wild moon beauty filled his heart with a pain that was a delirious sensation. He turned from her, but again returned to cherish the lovely face.

"You look like the Madonna," he said.

Above them the night breeze shook the dry frame of the elderberry long since ruined by the salt sea winds. One barkless branch rubbed against another, causing a weary squeaking, as though in ghostly derision of life with its toil and ineffectual striving to form leaf and blossom forever. The air was quiet again, and the tree, a musician unheeded and ancient, ceased its dreary scraping.

"Sweet thing," she murmured, touching his cheek, "I believe you are a pixie."

The air moved again more gently, drawing from the gorse bushes a faint sighing, and shivering in the heather where they sat with the stars hung over them like little lamps on the white branches of the dead elderberry tree. A moth fluttered round their heads, its wings touching them. She caught it, and released the frightened thing.

"It has toiled for months and months as a caterpillar

—dreaming of a night like this, when the moon would shine, and the night campion entice it to sip. Then it meets a mate—a mate, Billy, dear—and it loves, and then it dies.”

“How beautiful are your thoughts; beautiful as your saintly self,” he spoke his wonder aloud.

She leaned upon him, placing an arm on his shoulder like one whose strength is spent. She said something but he did not hear any word. A feeling of remoteness came over him, mingled with an apprehension; and supineness came over him, although his brain was calm; everything seemed unreal in the quiet and warm moonlight where they sat on the lonely terrace. The feeling of remoteness and unreality increased when she began to murmur deep in her throat, and closed her eyes, and pulled down his head. She fondled his cheek with her cheek, and turned her head slowly so that her mouth touched his lips. Her arm tightened round his neck, and she pressed her mouth to his mouth, while with a feeling of confusion still far away from him he tried to make himself return her kiss, lest she should feel scorned. He could not move.

She dropped away from him and hid her face in the heather. She lay still, and he heard her groan. He was miserable with shame, and unable to speak.

“I’ve dug my own grave,” she cried, sitting up with her back to him. The moon made a halo round her head. He moved beside her and put his arm round her neck. “But I I-love you so.”

He turned her over and laid his cheek against hers, hugging her in a half frightened, half rapturous way, staring into the moonlight, trying to tell her that he loved her, but remaining dumb.

"You don't like me, and I—I made a m-mistake. I will go-go away and not worry you any more, W-Willum."

Believing that she meant what she said, he was dismayed and unhappy. She stroked his cheek. He pulled her towards him; she resisted him, but held his caressing hand by pressing with her upper arm his wrist against her ribs.

"Come here, Eve," he said, excited.

"No, you don't like me," she complained.

"I do! I do!"

"No! you don't. You don't!" she said, miserably.

He struggled with her. She was strong. He felt a gorse bush pricking his leg, but did not care. He put his arms around her, drew her to his chest, and kissed her on the cheek. It was a beautiful and strange sensation to hold her masterfully, while she pretended to protest at his dominance. When he had hugged her many times, she said:

"Billy, why don't you k-kiss my lips?"

He hung his head in shame.

"Would you have to act passion, dearest? Don't be ashamed to tell me, Billy. You won't hurt my feelings."

"Yes," he muttered.

"Then haven't you ever kissed a girl on the mouth before?" she asked happily.

"Yes."

"D-don't believe you! Tell the truth, Billy. Have you?"

"No," he confessed.

He lay down in the heather, his hand straying in her

hair, while she fondled him, and he was in an ecstasy of peace.

"Life is compensated for by love," she whispered. "The gift of the gods; the only gift to woman!"

So they cherished each other, cheek to cheek, hands straying on hair and brow. Vapourer moths passed by them, evejars spun their song-threads, and the mid-summer moon grew brighter as it climbed towards the constellation of Lyra. Eveline said sadly:

"We will die, my darling, like the little flutter-life of the moth that went past. Look at the moon, so serene and cold in the sky. Look at her now, as among the stars she rides, so full, so white, and beautiful—but in a brief while she will w-wane, and the night be dark and we will be groping for her light. Oh, beloved, believe what I say; do not despise me. The moth will be dead when the moon shines again, but it is happy now! Oh, W-Willum!"

Her fingers interwoven with his, and the confusion of her breathing came with the sound of the low tide.

"I feel such a sweet rest with your darling arms round me.—I can hear your heart, Eve. You won't leave me, will you? I think I should die if you went away. O, why are you married?"

As suddenly as her passionateness had come, so it swept away, giving place to a wistful melancholy.

"Billy, let me go home now. I want to be alone, to think."

"Don't go home," he begged. "No, I can't let you go. You are everything to me."

"Poor Billy," she said, "you're only a child, really. I shall leave you alone."

He clung to her trembling, beseeching her not to leave him, pressing her into the heather and hiding his head on her bosom.

“Mr. Hermit, living in the wilderness,” she asked happily, “do you really care for me? Tell me. Tell me every thought you have, little boy, little sweet boy. Oh, Billy, you great rough thing. There now, I d-didn’t mean it. Oh—you mustn’t kiss me like that! Now be nice and take me home.”

“All right, come on,” he said, but she melted his mood with her girdling arms, saying that he was a naughty little baby to pout. On Lundy Island the lighthouses were flashing intermittently.

As they wandered arm-in-arm across Brakspear Down a double shot rang out, followed by a hoarse scream. A man shouted, several lurchers gave tongue, the echo rolled in the goyal; moon-spun figures approached.

“Did ee zee un?” asked old Voley; “did the great beast run past ee this way, zur?”

“You murderers,” shouted William, “you fools! Do you know what you’ve done?”

They stood and stared.

“What be us done, zur?” asked Brownie.

“You’ve shot Jack o’ Rags. He ran past us. Your dogs were running him! You hit him in the head, too. He was crying like a trapped rabbit.”

“Gordam,” moaned Brownie, “gorbruggee.”

Voley and Gammon grunted.

“Be ee dead, zur?” asked Gammon.

“Gorbruggee,” lamented Brownie mournfully, “an he were the shaep worritter. Gorbruggee! His sister at Exixir should be told.”

“If he isn’t dead,” urged William, “those dogs will

tear him to bits. Hark at their cries! Quick, down to the mines. We must find him."

"He'm it must have been us catched in gin t'other night," said old Voley the shepherd; "master girt gin it were for any animal to exsgape from."

"Oomigod," moaned Brownie, "us have shot poor Jackierag. Her should have been in the Grubber.* My boys did love old Jackierag. Wisht I'd give un a bit o' supper more casionally. Oomigod, us'll be hunged fur murderers."

"Us reckoned it were master great wolf," explained old Voley, as they hastened down the slope to the cove; "us heer'd un znarling, and the shaep crying, and zound of grunching."

The dogs' notes became sullen in the goyal. The three men were frightened to go near the black mouth of the mine. William and Eveline went into the cottage to get candles, and rushlights which he had made. There was paraffin in the can, into which they dipped an old mop. This was lit, and with guttering candles and the flaming torch they stepped cautiously into the cavern.

He went first and Eveline followed behind him, her hand trembling on his arm. The tunnel sloped downwards for the first twenty steps; they strained their eyes forward into the murk, and paused to listen. Once Eveline gave a cry of subdued fear as a large flying thing passed over the torch, and hitting wildly with her stick to keep the horror away, she knocked it down. It was a greater horseshoe bat, and lying on the stony floor its ears vibrated like a tuning fork. The thing of darkness had minute eyes, and a leafy formation on

* The workhouse.

the nose gave it a vague resemblance to the wounded zany.

“Look at its blood.” Eveline’s voice shook.

“It isn’t the blood of a devilflutter,” growled old Voley; “it be Jack.”

“Oomigod,” lamented Brownie.

Gammon stood on the bat to kill it, and in the gusty torchlight they crept forward, seeing more blood on the stones.

The mine branched forty yards into the hill. They could hear the deadened baying of the dogs. It was very cold, and water dripped from saturated patches. A chill draught blew past them, and air blowing from some ventilator shaft within. They came to it, and peered up. Bushes choked the far summit, but they could see a star unhidden by leaves or brambles. Down the left branch they stumbled, reaching at last what was apparently Jack o’ Rags’ lair. Bracken and straw covered the floor, and in one corner was a heap of gull eggshells. A musty smell hung about the walls, and rabbits’ skins were everywhere, hard and dry. The oily torch flung a sootiness into the atmosphere that made them cough. He was not discovered, so they crept back to the branch of the tunnels and went down the other.

A rusted truckrail led them on. They saw more blood. William went first with the wild light, Eveline following next and holding his hand. Deeper and deeper into the hill led the excavation, and the walls oozed moisture. Then before William’s feet yawned blackness. He leapt back, bumping into her. Cautiously they neared the edge of the shaft.

“I mind how they did tap water hereabouts,” said Brownie, “when they were sinking th’ shaft. It do go

down twenty foot, and at first were a trickle, but now 'tis a regular swellet. Dogs and all be gone, Oomigod."

Eveline beseeched William to be careful, and wrung her hands as he peered over, holding out the blazing light. The sound of black water flowing unseen in the darkness filled him with fear. He sensed the terror of the mad creature's stagger along an unfamiliar tunnel, the desire to conceal himself and to nurse his wounds. Perhaps along that black broken way he had crawled, nigh to death; even now the bruised bodies of man and dogs might be borne by the underground waters to the sea. A red-gold gleam on the black water, and the torch expired. By the draughtbent light of one candle they went back.

Both William and Eveline were subdued in the cottage. He said that he would make some cocoa, and began to split a baulk of timber that Jack only that morning had brought to him. The resinous wood was soon gold-spluttering and the tawny flames spearing the dark chimney. They sat by the hearth in silence and meditation until the kettle hummed its small tune in symphony of fire and water. Eveline nursed the kittens, and Tatters, who loved her, slept with his head across her ankle. When the cocoa was made she said that they must drink from the same cup; and while she sipped the steaming liquid she looked at him with bedusked eyes that no longer challenged, but seemed humble.

"Poor Jack o' Rags," she sighed, "poor desolated creature. I am so glad that I helped him while I could. I suppose he is dead? What if they find his body? There will be an inquest. O God!"

"That water will never give up its dead," said

William in a quiet voice. "And no one will miss the wild idiot." And added to himself, "Except me."

They sipped the cocoa, speaking at intervals. Afterwards he said that he was ready to escort her to Cryde Bay.

"Let us talk a little longer," she said. "I love you with the play of fire upon your face. Come here, I want to kiss you."

He did not move.

"What's the matter, Billy?"

"I was thinking of the future. I am afraid, Eve."

"Of what?"

"Of everything, but chiefly of you."

"Of me?"

She confronted him, till her ardour made him yield.

"It is foolish to talk," she murmured; "only love counts. We may be dead in a week's time. It can't be wrong to love, Billy. Do you think we are wrong? We couldn't help falling in love, could we?"

"But do you love Li—— your husband?"

"No! A thousand times no! ! But I tell you honestly that I like him. And I've told him that, too; only, like a man, he won't accept it."

Timelessly the night went by.

"The dawn will come soon," he said: "we must go back. Let us go and bathe, near the Claw."

"I want to remain like this for ever, beloved. Death would be sweet, if it came now, while we are with the Immortals."

"But people will talk about you."

"I don't care a damn. I'm so comfortably drowsy. No, I'm not going back. That poor man might not be dead after all. He might kill us." Her voice became softer, like the low notes of a nightingale. "I'm so

boo-fully tired, W-Willum. Haven't you a spare room where I can lay my weary head?"

"You can have my bed. I will go up and tidy the room. You won't mind there being no sheets, will you?"

"Of course not, Lord Tornsox. But what about you?" She was fondling the floppy ears of Tatters, whose amber-ruddy eyes adored her.

"Oh, I can sleep anywhere," he mumbled; "I slept on dead men and mud often during the war." She shuddered.

He went upstairs with a candle and remade carefully the bed. It was the fourth night that Moony Matthew had failed to come to his whistle.

When everything was prepared, he knelt at the open window and rested his arms on the deep ledge. The moon was very high and silver and the stars were pale. A night bird cried from the hill, and another answered far up the valley.

She was before the fire in the same attitude when he came down. She did not look round at him, but continued to muse with her chin on her hands. He saw her profile, and his heart beat faster.

"It's ready," he said, and knelt on the sacks beside her.

She put her arms round his neck, but said no word, accepting but not responding to his kisses. With his hand he loosened her hair and shook it over her shoulders. He seized a tress in his hands and bound it round his throat, then smothered his face with it, kissing it. He knelt before her, and draped it over her breast, so that only her face was seen, adorable, maidenly, pure. He kissed her eyes, which looked at him with such tender gravity, and smoothed her eyebrows,

then clasped her neck, but with impatience let go to take strands of her hair to plait. He dropped the strands to bow his head before her, tremblingly, and she raised his head and held it against her breast.

“How your heart is beating! How lovely and warm you are! Kiss me, Eve, kiss me.”

She hid her face on his shoulder, and shook her head, but held his fondling hand against her heart.

“Not now. Be still, dear one; this moment we are with God.”

“You don’t love me,” he cried.

“O Billy!” she whispered, “O Billy! I love you so much that I am afraid of myself. Let us go back to Cryde.” She did not move. Her arms clasped his neck. She knelt, grave and solemn, before the fire. He wanted to be free of the warm embrace, but his will was supine, his thoughts were thickened. A savage wish to desolate himself and his love came to him; he wrenched away his face and flung the encircling arms by her side. She seemed to have no strength, no vitality, as though her will were lulled by some opiate. Without a word he went towards the door, opening it, and standing still. He looked at her. She was kneeling on the sacks, and looking at him, motionless except for the quick rise and fall of her bosom, but how her eyes were soft and shining.

CHAPTER XI

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

THE puppies watched lest the god should try and slip away from them. He had endeavoured to do this several times recently when going swiftly up the hillside, but as he always took his own particular scent with him he was easily tracked. They watched him alertly, because the moon was full, and the god's movements might mean a fine hunt after milkydashels.

But the god opened the door and waited. When their kind friend the god's companion whispered, he shut the door and went to her. He spoke in a strange voice, and knelt on Hereward, on whom tears were falling, without apparently noticing that he was there. No pat or earfondle was given Hereward, who slunk away, followed by Tatters and Billjohn, to the pair of trousers in the corner which was despised now that they no longer seemed to be part of the god. And to their jealous amazement they had to remain there all night, for in the strange voice the god bade them go downstairs when later they attempted to follow to their usual rest. Thus deprived of his presence they were miserable, and slept fitfully.

As the moon passed over the valley, its light came shyly into the room and the darkness stole softly away. The bookshelf became silver, with a silver-and-jet cat curled on the poets' volumes. Gradually a kettle on

the table became silver-lustred. Upon the handle of the kettle was perched a silver headless bird. The pale visitant explored the dim corners of the room, and revealed a mass of brown and white hair that sometimes quivered and emitted little barks and yelps. Billjohn was dreaming of a canine ghoul with enormous white teeth and a long tail that enabled the ghoul to turn in its own length when running swiftest. Billjohn worked his feet at double their usual pace; but the ghoul overtook him and snarled at his tail. In terror he turned to look at it. His legs ceased to go. He tried to drag himself down the hill, with the ghoul ever at his tail, always about to crack his backbone with its teeth.

Billjohn heaved and shook on the trousers, and cries of terror came from him. The ghoul was no nearer, although its pace was terrific and his own movement was paralysed. He felt its hot breath on his back, and leapt away, and then with groaning sigh realized he was on the unfamiliar trousers. At his exclamation Grannie Gordangle jerked her head on her shoulders, ruffled silver-black wings, and called "Quoi?"

Isaak stirred in the wood cupboard, and a blunt nose and silver whiskers peeped underneath the door; an eye was silver-glinting. As it rippled to the round hole in the cottage door Oswald emerged from behind a pile of boots. Billjohn rose and yawned, then realizing where he was, he went to the staircase door woefully closed, and whined. Hereward heard him, and soon there was a duet. Tatters, thinking there was clamour enough to call the god, nosed round the room for scraps. Finding none, he joined the invocation to the god to come down. But the god did not come. So after a shivering doze on the trousers they all went through the rough hole into the cold dawn, just as the owl drift-

ing whitely down the goyal came to rest on the sill. He flapped to his beam, and as he folded his wings, a feminine protest disturbed his sensitive ear-drums. One skirl of dismay he made, then pursued by swifts and wagtails he beat up the hillside, and disappeared over the hill.

Diogenes the carrion crow went three days later. It was useless to remain when there was no longer a voice calling him that meant food. He had discovered that there was plenty to be eaten in the goyal; young birds in their nests, young rabbits that sat still with filmy eyes and drooping heads after the weazels and stoats had drunken their blood, yellow snails by the brook, bronzy sun-beetles, and strange woolly animals that never moved, but smelled sweetly in the heat. Neither Moony Mat nor Diogenes came back again to Rats' Castle.

The moon that had been the austere luminary of human passion fell into ruin and its gleam was dulled. Becky was playing with Pie one evening near the bleating goats when something ran past her. She caught it, held it in her mouth and growled. Pie came near and she spat at him, so he tripped away to catch one for himself. Thereafter they did not care very much whether they were given milk or stew. Mice were plentiful. Oswald suffered the pain of hunger until it drove him to hunt on the beach for dead fish and in the bracken for beetles, moths, and everything small that flew and walked. Once he discovered two greyish creatures squatting on the ground, looking like feathered toads. They hissed, and a bird like a hawk dashed at him, clapping its wings over its back and trying to knock him over. When he saw that it could do him no harm, he rendered eatable the babies with two

blows of his beak, and swallowed them as they were. The parent evejars chattered in anguish, but Oswald did not care. Thereafter he explored the country more thoroughly, and managed to find plenty to eat, including frogs and small rabbits. He forgot about the tall wingless food-giver who seemed to have forgotten him, and became agile and a quick walker in spite of webbed feet. Oswald was not, however, quick enough to avoid a white grinning snap in the dense undergrowth by a hawthorn; but the fox, disliking the taste of his flesh, left him for the ants and the brown sexton-beetles.

Grannie Gordangle the daw stayed in Rats' Castle. Once she had been married, but she was now a widow. Had she been younger, she might have taken another jack immediately after her mate's back was suddenly changed from smooth black to ragged red by the javelin-claw of Wizzle the peregrine falcon, who was passing over Sealion Cove. She herself had flown in terror at the window of the cottage, and fallen stunned, and awoken in a wicker cage. For three days she had starved and grieved, then decided to accept the food of the wingless creature, liking it so much that she remained after her release.

But she was not alone during the solitary days that followed the desertion of Diogenes. Reassured by the quiet of the building, other daws came to explore. A gay jack often perched on the ledge outside the broken window-pane and asked her to go for a fly roundabout. Grannie began to feel younger every day, and suggested that he come inside, but the jack was timid. He had such a beautiful sheen on his feathers, and such a spruce grey poll that she decided on impulse to go for a short fly. They dallied on the Corpsnout, and met Diogenes, restful after a heavy meal of sheep. Grannie

Gordangle and the jack had a meal, and by the crazy antics of the two afterwards, by their absurd cries and foolish aerial twirlings, it would appear they had decided to make a nest in one of the ancient holes of the cliff.

Isaak forsook the cottage. Brownie in the Nightcrow Inn one evening said he had seen the otter crossing the lane at the top of the valley.

"Her were terrible fast on her legs, her were. Her disappeared down a drang by my tette-patch, her did, surenuff, and so to the brook in Varmer Galsworthy's water-meadow. Mis'r Meddlesome doan't care, I reckons. Him be full of love for the ruddle maid, and she'm wedded a'ready, they do tell. But the gentry do not worry about morals, do they, Albert, midear?"

"Judging on the papers, I should zay no!"

"Mis'r Meddlesome be praper in love. She'm a tidy maid, too."

"I shouldn't mind her mi-self," chuckled Tom Vissik, and everyone stamped their feet, and Brownie looked sadly at him.

"But it be zerious, midear," his gentle voice warned. "I do mind th' time when I were in love wi' Bessie Kift down to Barnstaple afore Squire Harry died. No, doan't ee laff, Tom Vissik; it was very zerious for me——"

They laughed again, and Brownie, shaking his head and murmuring thoughtfully to the tankard, quaffed the ale at a draught. Later they did not laugh at him, but respected him as a man of wisdom.

For the gennulmun appeared at the Nightcrow Inn one evening, and drank two quarts of ale in five minutes. The last pint seemed to be swallowed slowly, but when it was drained he asked for a third quart. Brownie, who had been eyeing him with affectionate

pride, amazement, curiosity and delight, remarked that he must be thirsty.

“Tarrible hot weather, measter.”

The gennulum nodded, and fondled his dogs; and suddenly left the Inn without a word. Reflectively Brownie drank his quart. Nor did the gennulum go over to Cryde Bay the following day, but loafed about the village, rarely speaking to anyone.

“I did zee un in the churchyard reading the tombstones,” Brownie told the Nightcrow Inn. “ ‘What, be ee choosing ees grave, midear?’ I asks un. He did zigh and zay, ‘Noomye, Broonie,’ he zays, ‘I be here to think,’ he zays. ‘Company o’ dead men,’ I told un, ‘be unlucky, Mis’r Meddlesome.’ ‘The faithful dead,’ he repeats, ‘the faithful dead.’ ‘Faithful,’ just like that he spoke; ‘faithful,’ he zays—he’m full of words and eddication! ‘You’m thinking on the war,’ I says. ‘Forget it,’ I says, ‘asking your pardon, Mis’r Meddlesome,’ I says. ‘Broonie,’ he zays, catching my arm, ‘Broonie, you’m a kind heart, Broonie.’ I did tell the gennulum that I tried to do my best to help others, that be all, though I couldn’t afford to put money into the conviction bag o’ Zundays, for which zome do zay I be mean, although I have nigh on a zgore of childer.”

Tom Vissik, a huge jovial farmer of seventy-one years saw the gennulum meet the postman the next morning. He received a letter, and went in the direction of Cryde Bay.

“But us knew her went th’ day afore,” recounted Tom that evening, “because Harry Drew drove her to St. Brannocks Station in his jingle. My Lord Tornsox wull have to find another young lady. Else us must marry un off to one of our maids hereabouts. He’s got it bad, aiy, aiy!”

CHAPTER XII

AT THE NIGHTCROW INN AGAIN

AN hour after receiving his letter, William was sitting on the sandhills of Cryde Bay. The sun glared on him, but he was not conscious of heat or light. He noticed the people below on the beach, wondering how they could look so happy. Their laughter mocked at reality. He moved about from one place to another aimlessly, and by the stream that lost itself in the sands of the bay he took Eveline's letter from his pocket.

*Tuesday,
Two in the morning.*

Dearest Lord of Tornsox,

Oh, Billy, my dear, if my writing is incoherent forgive me, because it is long past midnight and I am distracted. Billy, we must not meet again: I'm not worthy, but I have been praying for the strength to do the only right thing, and that is not to interfere with your life any more. I know it means never seeing your face again. You will think me callous and abandoned. Think that I am. Then you will forget me sooner.

Billy, to think I shall not see you again. The room is cold, and like a vault. I can't sleep, so I'm waiting for the dawn. I can hear the tide, and feel I want to swim out, far beyond life and its tragedy.

If you had only come to say good-bye. I didn't mean what I said about your believing yourself to be a saviour of mankind. I was fretting about things, that's why I was so horrid. When you get this I shall be gone. Poor Billy, are you unhappy? I wonder! You were so sweet. But I must not write like this. I must be strong, or I shall be coming over to you right away.

In case you are lonely, I will write when I get back. Don't be angry, Billy, darling, because I'm inclosing ten pounds. Get yourself a little present, dearest, some new clothes and socks. Now it's too late, I remember I never mended yours. A fine woman I am, ain't I? Still, remorse is cheap, as you may have reelized.

I go back to a false life, but thank God one can't think if one is always doing something. I shall never forget you. One day you will find a true woman to love you, and look after you; but, Billy, don't be hurt, but you mustn't expect her to live in Rats' Castle! I am laughing now, old fellow, but I can't see properly to write.

Billy, dear, do not worry about Life. It is very distressing to witness your pain, believe me. But things will come all right. You are a brave old fellow. Your mind is a chaos of pure beauty—and when you can determine its source, and can impart it to mankind, you will be a great man. So I end my letter to you, most tenderest of men, with the request that you think only of your vision, and no more of E. F.

The tellegram came from Southampton late to-night, or I should say yesterday night, as now it's nearly dawn. I know you will think I made our (or

rather my) silly quarrel an excuse to clear off, and that I knew Lionel was coming home, but I swear I didn't, Billy dear. Sweet Tornsox!

The letter, scrawly and with misspelled words, and smudged as though with tears, was re-read several times. The reader was recalled to reality by the sound of footfalls beside him. Looking up, he saw a small and slender girl wearing a green jersey. She was about eighteen years old. He was conscious of a strange misery; the girl had a resemblance to Eveline. He noticed her smooth and freckled brow; her fingers were frail, like the feet of the goldfinches sipping by the water. Her locks, short and curling, were tawny like a squirrel.

She stood and watched the goldfinches. She whistled, as though she would speak to them. They splashed and ruffled in the stream, dipping their crimson faces, and twittering with joy of the cool water. He watched the girl, imagining that she was Eveline. She appeared unembarrassed by his stare. When the finches had flown, she turned and said:

“Isn't your name Maddison?”

“Yes.”

“Willie Maddison?”

“Yes.”

“I thought it must be. You probably think I'm mad to speak to you like this?”

“No, I don't. But I'm curious to know why you ask.”

“Do you know Mary Ogilvie?”

“I used to, when I was a boy.”

“She wrote from Findlestone, where she's staying

with an aunt, and said you were living near here, and we've been trying to find where to look you up."

"That's very kind of you," he replied.

"Where are you living? No one here seems to know."

He told her, and she said that her name was Diana Shelley. Regarding her fingernails, the slim little creature added, "Are you fond of music?"

She spoke with hardly a movement of her lips, with a lack of animation; her eyes were of the intense blue of the wild chicory flowers growing at the water side.

"I would walk miles to hear music."

"Then walk to church next Sunday after evensong. I'm playing for an hour. Half past seven. Come to tea, if you're not doing anything particular. You know the place? Monks' Orchard. Anyone'll tell you. Come to lunch, if you like, or come over in the morning. Mother will be glad to see you. And you might meet Mrs. Ogilvie."

"Thank you very much."

"Bring them, if you like," pointing with one foot to the puppies. "I must go now."

She acknowledged his bow with a slight inclination of her head, and strolled away to some girls on the sand who had been looking at her. Alone once more he read his letter twice, and then went to the rock where Eveline had sat and removed her shoes and stockings. Happy family parties passed him, children with pails and spades and large straw hats, cheerful mothers and brown-faced fathers. He sat with bent head, staring at nothing. More people came by, glancing at him curiously. Children came to stroke timidly the panting dogs, then they too passed on nearer the

sea, and their cries came with the plaints of gulls. He sat there for nearly an hour, crosslegged, unmoving, while beside him a skipjack beetle, seemingly terrified by the immense journey, commenced to traverse the desert of the hot sand with tiny movements that were almost fevered, so laboured it to reach protection.

He watched the journey of the skipjack beetle. It left behind it on the sand an irregularly braided mark. It was exhausted. He picked it up, and put it in safety near the limekiln. He walked away from the bay, climbing the lane across the base of the headland till he reached the familiar pathway to Brakspear Down. He stopped many times to look at Vention sands, which bore now such an aspect of desolation. The sward was brittle, and his leather shoes slipped on it. While he was climbing in puissant sunlight he longed to attain the hill's height where he might cast off the burden of his anguish. Above the heather line of the hill the sky burned with a fiercer blue, and the upright stalks of the brake fern gave it a ragged fringe. At the summit he flung himself down on the sward dis-verdured so cruelly of its summer flowers. But here there was no relief, no assuagement. He must walk on.

Two hours after leaving Cryde Bay he arrived at the cottage, but when he opened the door he wondered why he had hurried there. Already the place brooded upon its desertion. A web had been spun by a spider between the armchair and the bookshelf, and the insect was hanging in the centre of its snare. A gnat was glued to one of the support-lines, moving wearily its legs, conveying along the line too small a vibration to warrant its seizure. The ashes of the pinewood fire were flat on the hearth; the plain interior of the cot-

tage was gloomy and quiet with an absence of sound that told of its stagnation. He realized that an escape was not to be made by a contemplation of the sacks whereon Eveline had knelt and looked at him as she fondled the ears of his dog. He went out into the sunshine, and crossed the wringing shell beach of Sealion Cove whence the high tide had just ebbed; again he felt the anguished need to be up by the sky. The way lay past the rusty machinery shed in whose shade flourished the rank growths of hemlock and nettle. A chiffchaff piped higher up the goyal, its unvaried song borne on the stir of hot heather wind. The three dogs followed patiently, but immediately he sat down they seemed to collapse, and lay on their flanks, panting, with red tongues lolling over white fangs. A pair of ravens, surfeited after their meal in Deadsheep Gulley, passed over at a great height, and the sound of their croaking floated lazily down the shimmering sky. The sun scorched his cheeks; the dogs sought the little human shadow, but groaningly crept away again to seek coolness. Butterflies went by in the sunshine, a scent of wild thyme mingled with the scent of the sapless grasses; endurance was without avail, and he returned to the Cove.

Inside the doorless machinery shed there was a green shade. The glass of the window frames was missing, and the woodwork rotten, the red mortar crumbling between the hewn blocks of ironstone. A wren had its nest in a hole in one wall, and four tiny faces peeped forth, awaiting the parents. Their black eyes showed no fear of the human, nor of the dogs that immediately flopped down on the rubble and slept. No birds came with caterpillar or spider, and the little drowsy eyes of the nestlings narrowed and closed with their heart-

beats. He watched them, his thoughts straying back to the days of his boyhood at Rookhurst, when such a simple thing would have given him joy.

The forge, with its dilapidated chimney, stood near the shed, nearly hidden by elderberry, gorse, and bramble. A carrion crow's skeleton now rested upon the bellows, with a gold ant lurking within the shadowed cave of its white skull. At the base of the stonework was a heap of jagged iron ore, with creepers of bramble wandering over it. He pulled at one, and saw that it had put down a root over a foot into the pile, searching for ground wherein to obtain lodgment. Thus did the creeping plants of the earth care for the derelict works of man who by power and flame once crushed the iron heart of the rock.

He saw the dragonish flowers of viper's bugloss growing, and was reminded of the stoneheaps on the Colham road along which in faraway years he had been wont to make such lagging progress to school. Brown flowers of houndstongue, with their mousey smell, grew with them, the underside of their leaves a resting place for yellow trumpet-snails that would put forth their horns in the dewy twilight; when the glow-worm should seek to numb them with its poison. The plants were food for snails, the snails were food for glow-worms, the glow-worms were food for birds, and the birds were food for hawks and animals of prey. The human race was preyed upon by disease. And a taking-back into the earth was inevitable for the humblest weed under his feet. It would seem, therefore, that all endeavor was futile: the species might have its guardian, its godhead; but there was no heavenly protection for the individual; from dust it came, whether man or weed, and to dust it returned, its life like a spark struck

by steel from flint. In the light of fact, how feeble and frighteningly baseless seemed the imagined creeds and religions of mankind, of black man, of brown man, of white man—all so certain of eternal happiness after death. In vain his lonely spirit beat against the bars of truth.

At nine o'clock that night he was playing whist at the Nightcrow Inn, partially drunk. His partner was the bowler-hatted Brownie, who under the influence of ale sang snatches of some fuddled song about a man visiting another man's wife during her man's absence, and owing to an unexpected return the intruder was forced to hide up the chimney, perched on the chain-bar. The owner of the cottage lit a fire, and the intruder was soon shrivelled up. This folksong had over twelve verses, and sometimes the singer's memory failed him, so he inserted verses from *Seagull, fly away over the foam*. Their opponents were Muggy, who sat in his usual corner smoking a cigarette held in a long tube, and Tiger, the famous cliff-scaler. Tiger, clad in a dark jersey, slapped the cards down with wild bellows, his eyes fierce as those of the peregrine falcons whose breeding ledge he had so often robbed of the lanners. He usually shouted, since his occupation of blacksmith and fisherman, particularly that of fisherman pursued in rains and gales, had quickened his softest tones into gruffness. The nervous energy that enabled him to swarm a hundred and fifty feet hand-under-hand down a single rope and up again required some outlet during rest, and the release was made in a constant tapping of his left foot on the floor of the Inn, in his excited acclamations and exclamations, and in quick gulps at his beer.

William suddenly said he could play no more, and

sat down in a corner. Tiger began to tell him about his climb of Raven Rock some time in the past, when his wrist was sprained and he had been hauled up by his teeth. William tried to force himself to listen, but his thoughts were not in the Nightcrow Inn. In his mind he heard her whispering to him in the night, felt her hot breath against his mouth, caressed her smooth body that in the darkness, unseen, had seemed so pure and white to the touch. Every thought of her wounded his mind the more; wildly he wondered how the pain was to be endured for the rest of his life. He drank another quart of ale.

The minute hand of the clock was approaching the hour of ten when the door of the Nightcrow Inn opened, and a ragged man seemed to creep shamefully into the room. Immediately he was shouted at by the dozen men nearest the door, and one youth pushed him over. The news vendor, for such he was, sprawled on his hands and knees, and from the floor he whined at the injustice. The laughter that was given to the sight of this comic play provoked a ploughboy to seize his bag and empty the papers on the stone floor. William noticed that the ragged man's ankles were raw and bleeding, for he wore big boots without socks. His head was cropped, his jaws toothless with brown stumps, his skin the colour of a worn copper coin. An old shirt, from which the collarband had been ripped, was visible because the lapels of his frockcoat (which dragged on the roadway when he walked) flapped open. He had tied up the bottom of this coat with string, in order to prevent the wastepaper he collected in the lining from falling out of these improvised sacks. Somebody seized his boot and tugged, amid laughter; the ploughboy pulled the oddmedodderly frockcoat, the rot-

ten stitches gave way, and hundreds of paper, cardboard, cigarette, and wrapper fragments fell out of the pockets.

William realized the man's anguish when a whole day's labour was scattered on the floor of the Nightcrow Inn. He went to help in the salvaging, kneeling down to do so. The horseplay stopped, and others aided him. Tears rolled down the bony face of Jake. His billycock fell off, betraying the storage place of several crusts. William bought a quart for him. The ploughboy muttered a good-night, and went down to the King's Arms for a final drink. The landlord of the Nightcrow continued to turn the pages of a torn and grimy volume that he had picked up. Jake seized it from him, whining that it was valuable. William looked interested, so Jake offered it to him for sixpence. He replied rather coldly that he did not want it for sixpence: for a moment he was hurt that Jake's gratitude should express itself in this manner. Then he noticed that it was a Bradshaw's *Railway Guide*. He thought that he would look at Findlestone, because Eveline lived there. The seed of the idea sprouted and grew rapidly in the imaginative soil so richly fertilized by the beer he had drunken.

He purchased the tattered copy for the sum asked, and tried to find the seaside town of Findlestone.

"Looking for a train, zur?" enquired the landlord, after five minutes' search.

"Yes," muttered William.

"There be none now till Monday."

"Hard to find the place, zur?" he next heard him say.

"Yes, I can't read it," replied William, as he flung the book back to Jake, who had just sold his quart of beer to a poaching fellow called Tom Fitchey for eight-

pence. Jake picked it up and went outside, returning just before closing time with a sack, into which he stuffed his precious rubbish. William swallowed another quart of ale.

"Here's a local time-table, zur," said Gammon, handing him a small blue book. William found a list of the trains to Exeter, made an untidy copy of them, and glanced listlessly at the advertisements. These included, for some reason, a short essay on the rare wildflowers of the district. The name of the Scarlet Cranesbill seemed to stand out upon the flimsy paper, for he remembered that Eveline had told how she had found a plant by a stoneheap near Cryde Bay, how she had said that its name was remembered from childhood days. He realized that the name of the flower must have held her idle fancy as she herself was deliberating the desertion—immediately after the departure of Captain Collyer, for it was then she had mentioned it. With a piercing anguish at the thought he joined the labourers stamping out of the smoky inn. He fell over a prostrate form outside; it was Brownie. They took half an hour to reach Brownie's cottage a quarter of a mile away, both singing while they dragged each other in spirals and parallelograms down the lane.

Mrs. Brown, attracted by the dreary moaning of some song, opened the door of the cottage just as William, lying on the roadway with Brownie's arm around his neck, was pointing at a star.

"Fifty million times as big as the sun, Brownie. Think of it, Brownie. Where's our little planet in this system, Brownie?"

"Migord, Mis'r Meddlesome, I wisht I knowed where my feet were to. I tried to get upwards, but be dang if I can, zur."

“Doesn’t the thought terr’rize you, Brownie? What are we? Coming and going like a spark—just bits of life—coming and going, Brownie—and yet—Brownie—we don’t stick together.”

“Gorbruggee, zur, I do love ee, and will stick to ee, fur you’m a praper gennulmun. Now I do fear when my missus do zee me. She can speak politically fierce. That be her Welsh blood, gordam.”

“Brownie, you fool!” interrupted her voice from the gloom, “get up, now at once, immediately. There’s drunk you must be, and brought home by a gennulmun who should have knowed better than to get intoxicated.”

“Now, doan’t ee fret eeself, my maid,” came the sepulchral tones of Brownie. “Mis’r Meddle bant innoculated—he’m tarrible tired and resting. So I guar-anteed this gennulmun a bit o’ zupper——”

“Supper? Supper? At this time of night. Supper? Duw Anwyl!”

The dogs were licking William’s face, and Billjohn was settled to sleep upon his chest. He could see an indistinct white blur that was apparently the apron of Brownie’s wife. He wished that she would go away, so that he might talk with his companion recumbent beside him. But already Brownie had commenced to get on his feet. He pushed Billjohn away, and stood up; the white blur of Mrs. Brown’s apron slid up the sky, and he was lying on the roadway with Brownie endeavouring to speak, but unsuccessfully.

Mrs. Brown went away. She came back with a pail of water, and threw it over the men and the dogs, then went in and slammed the door. Brownie crept into the hedge on his hands and knees, and soon began to snore. Once in the night William awoke, remembering where

he was, and feeling a quietude under the stars that made remote all human joy and sorrow. In the water-meadow behind the cottage a corncrake rasped an unvaried song as it stalked a way through sedge and marsh-grass uncropped by the cattle. Up the valley came the roar of waves beating on the coast. A mouse pursuing its lowly quest among the ferns and dead leaves ventured across the road, and took sanctuary under his boots as Tatters whined in sleep. Then it passed on, climbed the rough wall, and entered the cottage to search with the cockroaches for scraps.

He lay at peace with life. The night was warm and comforting, like a bird overshadowing its young. So unbounded was the range of human thought that he could imagine himself to be at the margin of life indestructible. The wonder of existence, of the power that enabled him to touch with his outstretched fingers the ironstone of the road, of the thought that could envelop in its comprehension, during the fraction of a second, the whirling bands of incandescent gases around the largest star flaring in space—the wonder of these things indicated the existence of deity. This thought suffused him with an exalted joy; his spirit seemed to break from his brain and to travel beyond the tranquil orbit of the earth. Then once more he was lying on the cold ironstone, and the clock in St. Flamma's church was tolling the third hour of the new day. Brownie still reposed in the hedge bottom; but his regular breathing died away, and William himself was asleep. He was awake instantly afterwards, it seemed, and gazing at the round black eyes and spread white wings of Mooney Mat hovering enquiringly just above his head. The bird hung still for awhile, its feathered foot dependent, then sailed away in the direction of

the church tower. He rose, and pushed through the hedge. Among gossamery grasses his feet moved, until he had reached the top of the hill, and was nearer the aspiring larksong. He stood at the edge of a wheat-field, looking at the dawn that was like the arm of a dusky gipsy hung with silver bangles, for the new moon was rising over Dunkery Beacon with the morning star beside it.

CHAPTER XIII

TO FINDLESTONE

WHEN eventually he came back to the roadway a little fat boy, with eyes merry and black as currants, was poking Brownie with a stick, and chuckling as he did so. He was less than two feet in height, dressed in a pair of girlish knickers, with frills, supported by buttons to a flannel shirt. His bare feet and legs were brown as a sparrow.

"Go on, ye old dawbake!" he urged, jabbing with the stick. "Wake up, ye mazidawk;" and when he saw William he laughed merrily, rolled his black round head, as he said, "This be my feyther, Mis'r Mas'n."

"Hullo, Tikey," said William; "now, don't be an unkind boy and hurt father."

The child grinned, rolled his head about, and struck his parent with the stick, talking all the time. Brownie opened his eye and stared at his youngest son. Seeing William, he sat up, passed his hand over his head and said that he were tarrible cold.

"Ye've been droonk again, ye ould devil," gloated Tikey; "ye just wait till me mither gets hold of ye."

A girl slightly larger than Tickey came round the cottage wall, followed by others at varying intervals. Eventually the father had nearly a dozen young children playing around him. Tikey stole his bowler and put it on his own head; but it was too small for him

and he had to hold it in position. Brownie got up and went round to the cottage entrance. There he saw his stout wife. She was a Welshwoman from Newport, and had met her husband on a steamer trip in the Bristol Channel: he had been very sick; her maternal kindness had urged her to hold his head; and ever since she had held Brownie.

“Ach-y-fy! you’re a fine one, and no mistake. Drinking. Well, well. And with a gentleman who should have knowed much better, do you hear? And what about me and all my small children? And Tikey wanting new boots to his feet, poor bach. But what does their dad care, I wonder. Not very much, I should say. A good for nothing——”

“Doan’t ee talk zo, my maid, doan’t ee——”

“Indeed, don’t you dare to tell me off. I’m a proper wife and mother, and you, why, you’re just a bag of good-for-nothing bones and skin, look you. If I should think to stick a pin in you, beer and water would run out till nothing but a greasespot was left, whatever. Sunday morning, too. Nice thing for you to go to——”

“Now go easy, midear.”

“Indeed! don’t you dare to tell me what to do.” Mrs. Brown’s voice as it rose in pitch resembled the crow of a cock. “There’s a nice thing for you to go to ring the bells in God’s House after a drunken night. And you a Methodist, look you.”

“Wull, I bant narrow-minded, midear, and I do love to ring the tenor bell in the church though I be chapel through and through.”

“Don’t you talk to me.”

“You be doing all the talking, midear.”

“Well, well, Duw Anwyl!” gasped Mrs. Brown, turning to William.

"I be dalled if I like to hear too much political speaking," muttered Brownie, a forlorn penitent on his ragged legs, and passing a weary hand across his narrow brow.

Mrs. Brown began to cry, and went into the cottage and knelt down by the hearth. From a sawn barrel used as a cradle she pulled out a swaddled baby and rocked it violently on her bosom. Brownie invited William to breakfast, and they walked quietly into the one living room. Brownie sat down beside his wife on the settle, making attempts to take the infant from her, but she held it away. Brownie put his arm round her neck, and with a swift movement she thrust the baby towards him, dropped it into his lap, and rushed upstairs. Tikey and other children clustered round their father, laughing at the baby, who smiled at them. They clung to Brownie's legs, called him dear daddy, and wrestled with each other for his caresses.

"Poor feyther's been out all night."

"Ha, Granfer Mas'n, ye can't catch I!"

"Now, then, young Tikey, doan't ee bite feyther's ear like thaat, naughty boy."

"Mis'r Mass'n, ave ee any pennies in ees pocket?"

"Tikey, don't pull that dog's tail, or ye'll be bit!"

"Yar, gitout, no dog woan't bite Tikey, cause Tikey wull bite dog."

They yelled with laughter when William seized Tikey and pretended to pull off his little shirt. Tikey squirmed and kicked, wriggled and laughed. One of his brothers brought a collection of birds' eggs to show him, another brought a book prize from Sunday-school, another showed him a bag of marbles and two chipped blood-alleys, saying that each blood-alley was worth twenty ordinary marbles. Two girls aged seven and

nine years sat on the floor and stared at him, until meeting his glance they had to giggle, finally becoming laid out with mirth. Megan, their tall sister of fifteen, with dark eyes and adolescent figure, reproved them, blushing with shame for their behaviour.

After breakfast he told them that he was going away on the morrow, by the first train.

“Oh, but you mustn’t go to-morrow, sir!” exclaimed Megan, eagerly, “because us be going to have dancing and singing, and a great faggot fire at night. And there will be fires on all the Exmoor hills, and on the Dartie-moor hills, so parson said last Zunday.”

“Why?” asked William.

“It be Peace Day to-morrow, ye old silly,” shrilled Tikey.

He realized how far from the workaday world he had drifted, not to have known what was knowledge to the smallest hamlet child. Twelve months ago that very Sunday and he had been waiting to lead his dismounted squadron against the German salient at Rheims, the commencement of Marshal Foch’s offensive, when the armies of France and Britain were so weary and battle-shocked.

During breakfast he spoke seldom. Afterwards he walked with Brownie, who was shaved and dressed in his best clothes, to St. Flammea’s church. In the ringers’ room he waited while the six ringers pulled at the ropes, then walked to Rats’ Castle, packed a bag, put a volume of Keats in one pocket and a volume of Jefferies in the other, locked the door, hid the key under the threshold and commenced the return. While climbing the hillpath he realized that the dogs in front were excited by something in the bracken. It was a hare, throttled in a snare of brass wire, which the

animal's frenzy had drawn tight round its neck. The ground in a circle around the peg was scratched up; but it did not struggle, because its heart was burst for want of air. He drew off the wire loop; the head lolled back, with its gentle brown eyes swelled in the sockets. He stroked the soft ears, the cheeks puffy with strangulation. It was nearly dead, it would suffer no more. His own throat was constricted. He broke its neck, and threw it away for wandering foxes and crows. But remembering the Brown family he returned and picked it up, and went on through the ferns. At the top of the goyal he rested, looking down at the sea widening to blue-green immensity from the cove. Herring gulls wheeled above the deserted cottage, and among the bushes the roof of the machinery shed formed a brown patch on which jackdaws were perched. He took a final anguished look at the white beach where so often he and Eveline had dried in the sun after a swim, and, turning resolutely, walked back to Brownie's for dinner.

Megan had made a squab-pie of rabbits, young woodpigeons and dumplings, broiled together with onions and carrots, sweetened with sugar. She desired so much to please him; he knew this, and forced himself to eat what he did not want. In the afternoon the children played under an elm in the meadow, and William went to a sunken lane and sat down, remaining there till tea-time.

After evensong at St. Flammea's church he bade good-bye to them. Mrs. Brown said that she hoped he would come back soon. The children clung round her skirts and shouted at one another. Brownie leaned against the doorpost, smoking his short cutty. William gave Hereward the terrier to Megan, telling her to sell

him if she could; he was a well-bred dog, he told her. She stammered her thanks, while Tikey rolled his head, and laughed between his father's legs. Megan held the collar of Hereward as he turned to go.

"Us will zee ee again zomeday, zur," said Brownie; "us do like ee zo that ee must come back and be th' squire, midear."

This earnest of affection moved his heart so that he could not reply, but only nod to them.

"Us will keep the dog till then," Brownie promised him.

"I'll make un eat wums an snails, ye girt old silly man," yelled Tikey from the arch of father's legs.

The last sight of the happy Brown family was taken at a turn in the lane, standing in a group and waving to him, but long afterwards he heard the howling of Hereward the dog he had forsaken.

With the spaniels he walked through a valley, turning through a farmyard and clambering up a steep lane that led upwards to the planet Mars rolling along in the southern sky. At the top of the hill he saw far below him the dusky flat waste of the Santon Burrows, bounded on the west by a shallow sea glimmering white where long rollers were spent in endless foam. The dim roar of the sea lured him to rest awhile; then he went rapidly down the path, reaching the main road to the village of St. Brannocks. It was quiet as he walked along the deserted streets an hour later, and down the turnpike road to Barnstaple. This he quitted for the estuary shore, where the incoming tide was gurgling and racing up the sandy mouth of the Taw. Curlews were calling under the brightening stars, which shone in the moving waters as he rested on the bank. For two hours he followed the course of the river; and

finding a stack, he threw up the spaniels, climbed upon the hay, and tried to sleep. Nightlong came the cries of river birds, while he thrust away the spectres of futurity, and recalled the past in a tangle of wildest desire and pain. He slept between one and two o'clock, and rose before dawn and continued his journey, having breakfast with a baker's moulder in one of the smaller streets of Barnstaple. His host (who was about to go to the bakery and had offered him the meal when he had enquired for an hotel that would be open so early), refused to accept payment, so William gave him Tatters. This delighted the moulder, and just before four o'clock his strange guest left with Billjohn for the railway station, where he purchased a ticket to Findlestone. As the train left the platform he saw Tatters struggling in his new master's arms, and yelping in agony as he watched the god going away from him, he knew, for all time.

PART II

THE SCARLET THREAD

*"A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud."
From the Ode to the West Wind.*

CHAPTER I

19 JULY, 1919

FOR hours he had been looking listlessly through the open window at the countryside brown in the heat. Swishtailing cattle in the shade of drooping trees sought relief from the flies that buzzed and stung in the sun glare. The wheels of the carriage seemed to be tearing up the burnished rails as the train rounded a curve, and the engine was puffing harsh and invisible steam. The journey shimmered on.

When the first outlying houses of the port came into view William felt weak with nervous fatigue. The engine seemed to crawl into the station, and stopped with a thump that threw him on the floor. He opened the door and jumped out, followed by Billjohn. Porters were shouting, and from far away came the blare of a brass band. At the barrier an argument with a ticket-collector seemed imminent since he had no dog-ticket, but this he avoided by rushing through with the spaniel under one arm, his bag under the other, and jumping into one of the dozen taxicabs waiting outside. He flung himself into one with engine humming, and was about to tell the seated driver to go to the principal thoroughfare, when that individual let in the clutch and the cab leapt forward.

A smart fellow, he thought himself, believing that the driver understood the situation.

The station road sloped downwards, and it appeared to him as he lay back on the shiny cushions that the driver must crash into the houses at the bottom, at such a breakneck speed did they approach. But by applying the brakes and locking the rear wheels he managed to swing round at right angles to the main road, merely knocking over a small tree, one of a withered row before shops and houses. They passed under a railway arch, and down an avenue, across which strings of flags were fluttering in the breeze. The cab made a continued zigzag, and he was so alarmed that he tapped on the glass between the driver and himself, but no notice was taken.

The driver slowed up as he approached the High street, but taking the right-angle turn too sharply, thereby nearly ejecting his fare through the window, he again applied the brakes. The locked rear wheels skidded on the asphalt surface, the cab swung to the left and then to the right, and, turning completely round, knocked over the barrow of a swarthy ice-cream vendor, who spat at William, waved his arms, tore his hair, and called upon the Italian deity to aid him. The crowd surrounded the cab and an old gentleman who with half a skinful of wine inside him had been amiably strolling home to lunch watched angrily a large blob of pale ice-cream sliding down the shaven hindquarters of his senescent poodle, who was snuffling and shivering on a lead.

“You shall pay for this, sir!” fumed the old gentleman, who was dressed in a baggy brown suit, a large brown stocktie, and a brown bowler. “Do you know who I am, sir? What? My name is Dodder, sir—Mr. Archibald Dodder, O.B.E. Have you heard of Dodder’s Disinfectant, sir? I am that Dodder, sir!”

Several people began to laugh, and William, who was shaken by the accident and huddled in the cab, said that he was sorry.

“Sorry, sir? Sorry? You say you are sorry? Is that all you have to say? My dog will die of cold with all this filthy poison over it. And you are sorry? It is my dog who is sorry, sir! By heaven, sir,” he turned with purple face to the vendor, “stop that damned gibbering, sir. Isn’t there an Undesirable Aliens Act to keep wretched riffraff like you out of the country? What have we been fighting for, sir?” addressing an immature soldier in khaki, obviously a new recruit, who was staring apathetically at the glissade of cream, a cigarette hanging on his lower lip. “What have we been fighting for? For this foul-mouthed foreigner to dump his filthy mess upon my dog, sir, and to say that he is sorry? As for you, you drunken hog, I shall tell my friend Sir George Bogside, the Mayor, to take away your license!” he bellowed at the taxidriver, who with glazing eyes was hanging to one of the mudguards and trying to swing the starting handle.

“Wha’ say?” enquired the intoxicated driver in dull, thick blobs of speech. “Blas’ yer soppo dog! Wants’ aircut. Blas’ damn mayor. Blas’ Bogside. Blas’ whole damlot. Blas’ this damn puncture. S’Peace Day.” He continued his efforts to swing the starting handle, while Billjohn stood on the seat and barked at the shivering poodle, who ignored him and wearily held his yellow teeth and grey snout to the pavement. Several small boys were scooping up the cream, running away as a policeman came up. The taxidriver lurched sideways and the old gentleman fussily went up to him.

“I am Mr. Archibald Dodder, O.B.E., sir. Member

of the Conservative Club. I give this fellow in charge. He said he was sorry, sir! Outrageous, sir! I am a personal friend of Sir George Bogside. Now, blow your whistle and take them off to the station. They can be sorry there. My card, sir!"

The policeman took the card, fumbled for his notebook, dropped the card, picked it up, put it in his mouth, opened the notebook, and commenced laboriously to copy the name and address. Abandoning this, he walked to the front of the cab, and copied its number. The driver pulled himself hand-over-hand towards the seat, but the policeman collared him, and was invited thickly to go and have a drink with him.

"Come on, ol' fella', and have a drink."

"I want to see your lischensh."

The driver seemed to be masticating other blobs of speech, and his eyes glistened like dabs caught in a net.

"Blas' lishance. Blas' Lloyd Geor'. I'm old soldier. So'r you. Pea' day. Drink."

While this conversation was occurring, William leapt out of the cab, and jumped upon the foot of Mr. Dodder, who danced with fury.

"I am so sorry," he said.

"I knew it! I knew it! I knew you'd say you're sorry. You've got an apologising face? Can't you say anything else?"

"Yes, I'm sorry I said I was sorry."

"What's your name?"

"Maddison."

"Mad as a hatter!"

"Was yours, sir?" asked William, beginning to enjoy the fun, and looking at Mr. Dodder's large hat. "I live at Rats' Castle."

“Rats’—Castle!” repeated William, and several on-lookers laughed.

“So you live in a castle, do you, and then you get drunk and——”

“Well, it’s a sorry sort of castle——” began William, and Mr. Dodder shook his fist in silent agony.

“You’re obstructing the law,” solemnly warned the policeman, who had been solemnly writing in his book, “and, moreover, you have got *delrem trimmings*. I eard you say you’d got rats, now! It’s all evidence against you. Now, are you going to say where you live?”

“Rats’ Castle, I tell you, in Sealion Cove.”

“He’s drunk! He must be, to be so sorry on Peace Day!” fumed Mr. Dodder, gripping his arm. “He’s not responsible, giving false address like that. He’s incapable. There, I’ll take charge of him, officer. A good dinner will sober him.”

The driver had been making dazed attempts to swing the handle, and suddenly the engine was restarted with a roar. A score of people rushed away from in front and in the scramble Mr. Dodder’s bowler was knocked off, and a small urchin put his foot through it. The owner grabbed it and slapped it down on his head, and continued to bellow at the driver that Sir George Bogside would arrange the confiscation of his license. The ridiculous sight of his battered hat caused more laughter, which enraged him so much that he snatched it off and hurled it at the Italian, who was sobbing in the gutter. Wildly this person hurled it back, but it missed its owner and fell at the feet of an urchin, who cleared off with it.

Dense fumes of burnt oil poured out of the exhaust,

and the vibration of the engine caused his ribs and teeth to rattle as he climbed in to get his bag. Billjohn was lost in the crowd when he vaulted over the side a moment later. Men began to clamber on the cab, as though about to commandeer it, but jumped off when other policemen came up. He was shoved further and further from it. He had his bag; and the excitement lessening, he began to scan the faces in the crowd. Soon he reached the fringe of the mob, conscious now of loneliness. His dog was lost; every face was a strange face; everybody seemed radiant with the spirit of carnival; gay bunting and merriment everywhere, laughter and talk—he wandered aimlessly down the High Street searching the faces that passed him by.

Feeling thirsty, he sought the bar of an hotel, and sat down in an armchair. A waiter came with a tray, and he ordered beer. As the waiter moved away he noticed two young men sitting near him. One was heavily built, with reddish-brown hair flung back from a wide and tall forehead; he had a large ruddy face, small eyes, a slight reddish-brown moustache, a heavy jaw, a thick neck. He leaned forward and spoke to his companion in a deep voice that held tones of uncaringness and scoffing humour. As he spoke he rubbed together the palms of his hands.

“Well, Peter, well, she’s been very kind to me. Yes, I suppose you’re right. I *am* a rotter to run the poor old darling down. After all, she *is* a poor old darling, and I—oh, damn it all—I—like her. She’s a poor old darling.”

He emptied his tankard, laid it down to be refilled, wiped his moutache, pursed his lips, frowned and growled—

“She hath wasted with fire thine high places,
She hath hidden and marred and made sad
The fair limbs of the Loves, the fair faces
Of gods that were goodly and glad.”

“By god, it’s great stuff, Peter. It *is*.”

“She slays, and her hands are not bloody;
She moves as a moon in the wane,
White-robed, and thy raiment is ruddy,
Our Lady of Pain.”

“I don’t know, Peter, I don’t know. By god, but Swinburne was a great fellow. He *was*. By god, he was. Pain made him an artist. By god, it did, Peter. Pain has made me a drunkard. By god, it has. Oh, well. Good luck!” He drank another pint.

“Though sore be my burden
And more than ye know,
And my growth have no guerdon
But only to grow,
Yet I fail not of growing for lightnings above
me or deathworms below.”

“By god, it’s great stuff. It *is*. Don’t you think so?”

“I told you before, Warbeck, I don’t care for you spouting Swinburne.”

William regarded the speaker. He was a thin youth of about eighteen years of age, with a white moustacheless face, dark hair, and timid hazel eyes. He wore the cadet uniform of the Royal Military College, and as he lifted up his glass to drink William noticed the small hand that clutched it, the slender wrist on which was

fastened a gold watch. Apparently he was gulping down whiskey-and-soda. After draining the glass he shuddered, as though it was distasteful.

His companion grunted, and stared at the carpet, where a cigarette end was burning a small hole.

"I didn't know, Peter. He was, I think—yes, of course, he *was*—the greatest poet since Dante and Shakespeare.

‘Ah, beautiful passionate body
That never has ached with a heart!’

By god, Peter, Swinburne couldn't half drink—write, I mean!

‘More kind than the love we adore is,
They hurt not the heart or the brain,
O bitter and tender Dolores,
Our Lady of Pain.’

By god, Peter, I don't know, I don't know; no, I don't know, by god, I don't, Peter. I'm getting drunk. Well, I'm going to have another wet one. How about you?"

"It's my turn to pay, Warbeck. Here, I'll take your tankard. I think I've had enough. I'm going to tea with the Fairfaxes to-day."

"Why, you've only had about one, and it's weak muck, too. Good lord, Peter, you aren't half a chap. I'll have a Dog's Nose."

The cadet carried the glass and tankard to the bar, and asked in a soft voice for a whiskey-and-splash and a Dog's Nose. While he was waiting, a fierce grunt from Warbeck caused him to glance in his direction. Warbeck was glaring towards the door. Turning his

head gradually, William saw that two men had just entered. Both were tall. One was booted and spurred, and the other wore the uniform of lieutenant in the Royal Navy. He had fair curly hair and blue eyes, and was leading on a silver chain a brindle bulldog with a harlequin stocking tied round its neck.

"What are you having, Naps?" enquired the owner of the bulldog.

"What have you got in the way of a cocktail that isn't entirely poisonous?" said the booted one to the barmaid.

"Oh, I think you've sampled the lot, Lord Spraycombe," simpered the girl.

"Give me anything out of a bottle that's wet. No, I'll have a martini. Shake it well, won't you? Hullo, young White! Sorry to see you going to the devil. Whatever is that horrible brown stuff you've got?" He pointed with his riding whip.

"It's Dog's Nose, but not for me."

"Dog's Nose? Are you studying botany?"

"No, sir."

"Oh, I see: it's a drink, and not a wildflower."

"It's for my friend Warbeck. Beer and gin. He likes it."

"Oh, is that the gentleman?" said Lord Spreycombe, half turning to look at Warbeck. "I've often wanted to see him. Heard about you, young fellar," turning completely so that he leant back against the bar. Cocking his bowler hat over his black eyes, and pointing with a crooked finger, "I've heard a lot about you and Dog's Nose. Inseparables, aren't you, what? Thanks, Tubby. Well, here's the best!" taking the cocktail and tossing it down his throat without letting it touch his teeth. "Three more like that, I think. I like 'em with

the moss on. And how about you, Swinburnus redivivus? Another Dog's Nose? Or three Dog's Noses?"

William was unable to decide whether the speaker was sneering at the younger man, or whether an unusual manner hid amusement and satirical good-humour. Everything about the Viscount Spreycombe, M.F.H., known as "Naps" to his intimate friends and to those who read *The Tatler*, *The Bystander*, and *The Sketch*, seemed long and lean. His face, his teeth slightly projecting, his body, his coat, the narrow points of his leather hunting waistcoat, his thin legs in black riding boots. Dark crispy hair and moustache, red cheeks and thick red lips, keen dark eyes over which long lashes and deep lids lazily drooped. He wore the black, yellow-barred tie of Brasenose College.

Warbeck's face had flushed, he was nervously biting the nails of his fingers, and grunting uneasily at each remark. He rose from the chair, rubbed his hands together, extinguished the smouldering cigarette end, and said with exaggerated courtesy as he raised affable eyebrows to the other:

"Thank you, er—Spreycombe—I think is your real name? Three Dog's Noses, I think!"

"Splendid! In a jug? The bard can have this jug, can't he?" exclaimed Spreycombe, seizing one filled with water and chucking the contents out of the window. "Three Dog's Noses for Algernon Charles the Second. Make it half a gallon! The bard is thirsty."

The four stood up by the bar and drank. William listened to the apparently jovial conversation of Spreycombe and Warbeck about foxhounds. Peter White spoke hardly at all, but leaned against the wet bar, taking occasional gulps at his glass, each followed

by a wry face and a shudder. The cadet stared at the carpet, looking distressfully round the room, listening to what was being said.

“Did you enjoy your swim early this morning?” asked Warbeck, who seemed to be more at his ease. “I saw you, I think, with the beautiful Mrs. Fairfax diving in heroic manner from the breakwater. Her harlequin bathing dress is interesting. I notice you have one of the lady’s stockings for luck round the dog’s neck.”

“Oh, that? Oh, yes, I took that from the lady as she was going in to bathe. What’s the matter with Peter White? If you’re feeling bad, laddie, it’s the first door on the right through the passage.”

“I’m all right, sir,” mumbled the cadet.

Lord Spreycombe turned round and swallowed the three cocktails lined up on the bar. Then, tilting up his bowler hat, “Quite ready. Ta-ta, Algernon Charles; don’t drink too much, or you’ll boil and bust at the bonfire to-night. There’s some Swinburnian alliteration for you. See how easy it is! Now, don’t look so angry—it makes you look just like a Hun. Bye-bye, Peter White. Hold on to your purse!”

The satirical voice ceased as the door closed behind it. To his astonishment, William saw that Warbeck had puckered up his huge face and was crying. He clenched his hands and bit his lower lip, his face uncreased itself, and looking up at the ceiling, he muttered:

“By god, Peter, he is a swine. He’s jeering at us both. How does he know all about me, unless she’s told him, the long lean lounging insolent hound? It’s intolerable. She’s about with him every day, and she’s no more to him than any other woman. He’s rolling in money. And I—by god, Peter—I—I would cheer-

fully give my life to have her smile from across the road. By god, it's intolerable, the insolence of that man. And what does she care?

Wert thou pure and a maiden, Dolores,
When desire took thee first by the throat

And yet—and yet she is all right. I oughtn't to talk about her—it's all wrong. She is a poor old darling, and not very happy. I'd die for her willingly."

The speaker, at whom other men in the room were amusedly looking, wrung his hands, and tears came again in his eyes. His companion was clinging to the bar; William feared he was going to faint. He went to him, seized his arm, and led him to the door. His legs seemed swinging from his hips, and he stared piteously.

"Julian, don't leave me," he managed to gasp to Warbeck, who sprang forward and took his other arm. "I ought to go—t' tea."

"He can't drink," said Warbeck to William; "he's always sick. Oh, god, I oughtn't to have let him drink so much. That's all right, Peter, old man—you'll soon be all right. I'll take him, now; don't you bother any more. Oh, here we are: let's leave him here for a bit. He'll recover. He's been in here before. Don't worry, Peter, old boy. You're all right now."

Then to William he said, "How about another drink?"

"Certainly."

They went back to the bar.

"My name is Maddison."

"Mine is Warbeck. I'm sorry I haven't any money

to buy you a drink. Father sends me the doings on Tuesday."

"The doings?"

"My weekly remittance."

"Oh, you don't live down here?"

"No, in town. Have you tried Dog's Nose?"

"You prefer that?"

"Thank you," said Warbeck with grave courtesy, and bowing.

The drink smelt and tasted like the flower of geranium. Warbeck explained that it was a favourite drink of stokers and Cornish miners. He drained his tankard at a draught, and was invited to have another, which he accepted immediately.

"Do you know the Fairfaxes?" asked William suddenly.

Julian Warbeck stared at him, and said slowly,

"Yes, I have the honour to know a lady of that name. Why?"

Nervously they glanced at each other, and looked away.

"I've got a spaniel to give them."

"Well, I should give it to them."

"But I don't know their address?"

Warbeck stared uneasily, frowning, and biting his nails.

"I could get it at the post-office, I expect, but that's closed."

"Don't you live here?"

"I live in Devon."

"Devon?"

Warbeck frowned at him. Then he stroked his chin, lit a cigarette, and said in a voice that William had first

heard on entering the room, "Have you recently shaved a beard?"

"Yes."

"You're a painter fellow, aren't you? And a cousin of Phillip Maddison?"

"Yes, he's my cousin."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"No."

"He used to be Adjutant of one of the Rest Camps on the Leas, and got kicked out for never being there. Extraordinary! Why? do you ask? He was with Mrs. Fairfax all the time! Where is he now? God knows. Certainly I don't and as I don't go to church I suppose it will never be revealed to me. I want to know, because he owes me five pounds. Lina met you in Devon, didn't she?"

"Yes."

"She told me you were a painter. Haven't you noticed a resemblance to Romney's Lady Hamilton?"

He pointed to a calendar on the wall, advertising Dodder's Disinfectant, and having in its centre a reproduction of the famous portrait. The turned shoulder, the rounded bosom, the lovely gentle feminine glance all recalled to William a memory of Eveline sitting on the headland sward, resting on one arm, waiting to talk to him when he had finished gazing across the Santon Burrows.

"Sorry I can't pay for a drink," Warbeck was saying.

"I'll pay."

"Thank you," he replied with courtesy.

"Dog's Nose?"

"It is a good suggestion. And I say—I hate to ask you—but could you, er—until to-morrow, of course,

when the doings will arrive from father—could you lend me a pound?”

“I’ve only got a few shillings till I cash a cheque.”

“You could cash one here. Only,” his voice lowered, “don’t say you are a friend of mine, because I owe them a few bob already. The measly manager will probably do it for you.”

He saw the manager, who agreed to change a cheque for a pound, but no more. This was immediately borrowed by Julian, who went off to the billiard room in order to play snooker for penny-a-point. So William was relieved of his presence as well as of his pound, and went out, returning immediately when he remembered Peter White. He found him in a state of semi-consciousness, leaning against the wall of the lavatory, and, calling the manager, helped to carry him to his bedroom. They took off his shoes and tunic, and laid him on the bed; and, looking in a drawer to find a clean handkerchief to wipe Peter’s lips, he saw a photograph of Eveline, signed with the words *From your Mignon*.

CHAPTER II

19 JULY, 1919 (*Continued*)

AFTER a solitary meal he walked up the High Street of Findlestone, which was crowded with merry people. Girls four and five abreast and arm-in-arm walked in the centre of the road; young men in mufti and uniform did the same, surrounding the girls and kissing them. Tumbled hair and flushed cheeks and wild laughter and gay dresses seemed to wave and flutter in the merrymaking throng like the red and blue and green and black and yellow pennants and flags and ribbons waving and fluttering on strings stretching across the road from shopsign to shopsign. Old Archibald Dodder, passing William by Corvano's Café Royal, offered him a five pound note for several reasons; one being that the old gentleman was inebriated; another being that his only son, a lieutenant-colonel of foot, wounded six times, had survived the war; another being that the young man looked, with the stains of sleeplessness on his face, as though he might be a starving out-of-work. He refused it, but entered the café for a drink with him, although he did not want it. The old gentleman was now wearing an ancient straw hat with the brim cut away except for a narrow peak in front, giving it a likeness to a jockey's cap, and his trousers were slit to the knees where the creases had been, so that they flapped as he walked, exposing his

socks, parts of his pants, and a pair of suspenders. He slipped away from him as soon as was politely possible, since his host's idea of generosity on this occasion was to render him inebriated by giving him a drink called a Snowball, which was a mixture of every kind of liqueur and spirit.

He continued to saunter up the streets, wondering what he should do to find Eveline, while girls thrust ticklers into his face and boys squirted water at him from leaden tubes. A strange woman kissed him; another tried to pick his pocket; he was pushed over playfully by a one-armed civilian; a sucked orange was flung at him; bloodshot eyes leered and laughed near him; a saucy female asked if he wanted a girl, and replying in the same saucy manner he said that he would prefer a glass of beer. She attached herself to him, but finding him untalkative enquired if he had lost anything, so he replied that he was hoping to: instantly she slapped his face and lost herself in the murmuring throng.

Then down the road, marching strictly to attention, came a band of urchins, barefooted and in rags. At the head of the column marched the commander, wearing the brown bowler that he recollected having seen on the head of Mr. Archibald Dodder. He wore a discarded officer's tunic that reached between his knees and ankles. Behind this five-year-old marched the band, producing curious noises from tin whistles, cardboard tubes, a concertina, biscuit boxes for side-drums, a zinc bath of a bass drum, bones, and rattles. With heads erect the dozen ragamuffins marched, in the centre an infantine ensign with blackened face bearing draped colours—a shirt tied round the top of a decomposed umbrella. Their march past was an

imitation of the morning's procession. He flung a handful of coppers among them. Down went colours, drums, trumpets, fifes, swords; the rabble scrambled and scratched. Others copied the example of the benefactor, and soon hundreds of coins were flung. A little bareheaded girl ran forward to secure some, and was immediately pushed away by the commander. She stood in the road and cried, her arm up to her eyes. He knelt by her side, trying to convince her that she was not really hurt.

"Quillie wants to play at soldiers," complained the child.

"But they're so rough."

"Everybody's dam rough to Quillie."

The child put a warm arm round his neck, laying her head against the cheek of the kneeling man, caressing him with locks soft and brown as the breastfeathers of a linnet.

"Quillie's runned away from Martha."

"Who's Martha?"

"Martha is Quillie's maid, and at bedtime she is Quillie's golliwog."

"And who is Quillie?"

"Quillie's me. Quillie doesn't care a damn for anybody."

"Well, if Martha is looking for Quillie, we must look for Martha. She may be crying."

"Martha often cries. She's gone to have one."

"Have one what?"

"Have *one*, silly! Martha said to Quillie, 'You wait here, lovey, while I have one, 'cause it's Peace Day.' Martha went into a shop. Quillie runned away. Let's go to the Leas, and roll on the grass with the dogs, shall us? What's your name?"

"William."

"Quillie likes Willum."

"William likes Quillie."

The child moved her head so that her lips came to his mouth, giving a kiss.

"Willum's nice to kiss. Nicer'n Naps or Peter or Daddy," she said. Her moist hand was wriggled into his, and she imperatively led him up the High Street, making two steps to his stride. Soon they turned up a quiet passage leading to the promenade; but the sight of a man in front made her cry, "There's Jay Doubleu. Quillie hates Jay Doubleu. Take Quillie away, Willum."

She pointed at Julian Warbeck. Immediately he realized whose daughter she was, and a strange pain filled him, so that his voice was mute, and he could only stare at her. Flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood, spirit of her spirit: from the strange and lovely flower had loosened this petal. If only she were his, how he would guard and cherish her, how her purity would sweeten his life, a lamb guarding its shepherd.

The girl was clutching his coat, and he saw that Warbeck had turned and was walking towards them. As he approached, William noticed that his eyes seemed more deeply sunk in a face more roughly flushed than before. When he stopped before them he frowned as though in an effort to concentration; he thrust forward his head, glared, and said in a thick voice:

"So you have delivered the dog, have you? You haven't been very long in re-establishing yourself."

"You've had too much Dog's Nose, my dear chap."

"What?" glared Warbeck. "How dare you tell me that I'm drunk. Im *not* drunk! By god, it's intolerable, the insults and insolences that I have to listen to

from people of tenth-rate intelligence. By god, Madison, I'm *not* drunk."

"Well, don't distress yourself, Warbeck. I merely suggested that you had taken too much Dog's Nose."

"I *haven't*, I tell you," insisted Warbeck, in piteous rageful distress, "I *haven't* had too much. I'm *not*—hicco—drunk. And even if I *am* drunk, that is no reason why I should have to tolerate your intolerable and insolent remarks. Where are you going with Quillie, ur?"

William feared that at any moment he would leap forward and attack him. Warbeck's big face was full of rage: with nervous agitation he was flinging back the tawny hair from his brow.

"We are going for a walk. If I were you, old chap, I'd have a rest for a bit. Have you had any lunch?"

"Why do you ask me that? No, I haven't had any lunch. And if I prefer not to have lunch, is that the concern of anyone but myself? I—I—oh, it's—I—hicco—"

The child wailed to be taken away, saying that she was afraid of Jay Doubleu. Hearing what she said, Warbeck frowned; then his face unpuckered and with a gesture of despair he turned away his face. It became creased again, like a poppy that has recently burst from its sheath. He saw that tears were running down his cheeks, and heard him sob, "She's afraid of me—that child of sunrise." A sudden sympathy made him go to the distressed youth and lay his hand on his shoulder.

"Don't worry, I say, Julian."

"How can I help it?" groaned the other, "in a world of miserable beasts, caring nothing for beauty, all doing their best to drive poets to madness! Bar-

barians, to whom beauty is nothing! I won't let you have Jonquil. She's run away from Martha. I'm going to take her back to Lina. By god, don't you try and harm her! She's the only lovely thing in Findlestone. Give her to me, you long insolent fool."

He rushed with whirling arms and lowered head at William, who feared that he had to deal with a man much stronger than himself. Jonquil shrieked, and William pulled her aside with him, while Warbeck struck the air and fell sprawling. His head bumped on the roadway, and he did not get up, but lay there sobbing.

"Run, W-Willum, run," urged the child. "Run to the Leas."

William felt acute pity for the distracted youth, but he walked away, and reaching the top of the street, glanced round and saw that he had got up and was leaning against the railing of a house, pressing his head with his hand.

Before them was the sea, but the beach was hidden owing to the height of the sandstone cliffs on the Leas of which the Findlestone Town Council had, years ago, built the promenade. Residential houses and private hotels faced the Leas, with small gardens before them, a pavement and roadway, then a number of grassy lawns bordered by low connected chains stretching from post to post, on which people were sitting, or endeavouring to sit, in spite of the efforts of children further down to jerk them off, Jonquil led William over a chain, and on to the grass.

"Let's pretend we're gipsies," she suggested; "Quillie will be the queen, eating b-bread and honey, and Jay Doubleu can be Bluebeard. Now you say, 'Sisterann, sisterann, do you see him c-coming?' and

I'll say 'Shootbangfire' and kill him. Do you like Jay Doubleu, Willum?"

"He's very unhappy, my love. He seems to be tormented by something," he said, despair in his own heart.

"Quillie thinks he's a dam swine."

"Hush, Quillie! No one's a dam swine, really. You mustn't speak like that."

"Is it naughty?"

"Yes."

"Then Quillie will say it again. D-dam swine."

"Does Martha speak like that?"

"No, but Mummie says Jay Doubleu's a dam swine, so he is, mustn't he?"

"And what does Father say?"

"Jay Doubleu doesn't come any more now Father's come home from the East. Father plays tennis."

"Without Mother?"

"Erhum," she nodded, "sometimes."

"Do you like father?"

"Not so m-much as Martha or Mummie. Or you," she added, rubbing herself against him.

They were sitting in the sunshine on the cindrous grass. A band began to play in the bandstand a quarter of a mile to the right along the promenade. Thousands of people were passing and repassing on the asphalt walk of the Leas. Continually William's glance searched the faces.

"Don't you want to play gipsies, Willum?" asked Jonquil wistfully.

"Of course I do. If you promise not to say dam any more?"

"All right. Then you be chief, and sit here before the fire. Now order me to go and get wood for a fire,

“speak r-rough to Quillie. You see, I were stolen by you, and you beat me, and swear and are always drunk, and you married me, but never loved me, but loved others instead. Tell me to go and get w-wood, and I cry.”

She stood up, pretending to cry.

“Go and get firewood,” he ordered gruffly, “and be quick about it. And snare a rabbit for my supper. And get mushrooms and wild apples. And if you dawdle, I shall tie you to the caravan wheel, flog you——”

“To a inch of l-life?”

“Exactly. Flog you to a inch of l-life, rub salt into the wounds, leave you to the wolves, and a mouse will come and bring you berries to eat. Now go, and be quick!”

With a delighted laugh Jonquil skipped away, and commenced her pleasant hardship. She returned shortly.

“Quillie’s caught a nice bunny,” she said, laying a discarded cotton glove beside him, “and got some m-mussrooms.” Fragments of an apple core and shreds of a banana skin were laid beside the rabbit. “And the firewood,” which consisted of bits of paper, a bootlace and spent matches.

“W-Willum?”

“Yes?”

“Don’t let’s play any more. Tell Quillie the story of a poor little stolen girl who was whipped and rubbed with salt and was brought berries by a mousie. Quillie loves W-Willum better’n Martha or *anyone*.”

“Willum wishes that Quillie were his.”

“Then steal Quillie!” she tempted.

“For this afternoon?”

"For always."

"But what about Martha and Mummie?"

"Quillie hates Mummie."

"But she said she loved Mummie."

"Only sometimes, when Mummie doesn't whip her, and rub salt into her wounds."

He thought, The Little Liar! then kissed her impulsively, and stroked the soft auburn hair.

"Tell Quillie about the little girl."

"Her name was Swallow Brow."

"The little girl's?"

"Yes, and she was pretty. One day she was playing on the sands with her dog——"

"What was his name?"

"His name was Tintack. He chased a bunny, and lost Swallow Brow, who was stolen by gipsies, one of the band of the Bloody Hand!"

Jonquil shivered with enjoyed terror.

"It was near a large lake. The little girl, Swallow Brow, was rowed in a boat to their secret island."

"What was that c-called?"

"Heron's Plume Island."

"How lovely!"

"On Heron's Plume Island the gipsies of the Bloody Hand made her build them a hut, which she did, making her terribly tired. She lay down to sleep, and in her sleep a swallow, also tired, perched on her head, and went to sleep."

"Why was he tired?"

"He had flown thousands of miles from Africa."

"Why?"

"Nobody knows."

"Not even W-Willum?"

"Not even m-me."

"Erhum."

"The gipsy saw them asleep. He kicked Swallow Brow, and made her cry. He caught the little swallow——"

"Oh, W-Willum!"

"And he put it in a cage——"

"It will escape, won't it?" she pleaded.

"If it doesn't pine away and die."

"Quillie will open the cage," she insisted, jumping up and down with joy.

"Well, the little girl was beaten and kicked again. She was sent to get a bunny for supper and sticks. She brought them. In the cage the swallow was beating its wings, and crying. Why, Quillie, what's the matter?" Quillie was crying, too.

"Not really crying," she said. "Really very happy."

"Because, you know, the swallow won't really die?"

"Erhum," she nodded.

"The little girl made the supper. Then she went to sleep again. In her sleep another little girl called Quillie came to her, having floated there on the back of an owl."

"Me?"

"Yes, you were on the back of an owl."

"I did ride there once, when I were l-little, I 'member."

"Perhaps that was the time. On the back of the owl Quillie was riding, and she had ten fairies with her. Five opened the cage, and out flew the swallow, singing sweetly. The other five were ordered by Quillie to lift up the little girl, and they did so. The owl flew back with her to her mummy. And, do you know,

Swallow Brow and the five fairies hid themselves inside Quillie's heart, and they are there now. And I believe the swallow must be in your eyes—they are so blue, you sweet baby girl."

He would tell her no more, although she begged and coaxed; so she went away, returning some moments later, and, finding him still unresponsive:

"What's the matter, Willum?"

"I wish I were dead," he muttered, with a child's sudden abandon.

"Quillie often feels like that. So do Martha. She says, 'Lovey, I'm damwell fed up with being messed about. If it weren't for you I'd clear off.'"

The mimicry was done with such quaint gravity that William laughed, and his mood passed.

"W-W-Willum!"

"Ess, midear?"

"Why do you speak like that?"

"Oh, I'm copying someone I knew when I was your size. But what do you want?"

"Quillie would like to chuck stones into the sea."

"Do you know the way down?"

"Erhum."

"Come on, then."

Gaily they joined the crowd on the Leas, walking towards the bandstand. Jonquil led the way down a zigzagging cliff path, passing wild mallow plants and campion in bloom, and along a dark pathway through tall pines and firs that stayed all light except broken restless fragments of gold on the brown needles and cones. Lying in the shade were many couples, some sitting apart and talking, some reclining side by side in silence, some bound together by each other's arms, motionless and quiet. A solitary terrier covered

with dust was digging a hole in the earth, yapping excitedly to itself, and pausing to get the rabbit of its imagination.

The white margin of the sea was freckled with human beings. Upon the brown pebbles the waves of high tide broke and swirled, rushing forward and drawing back for a fresh leap with a crashing rattle of rolled stones. Along a track of matting laid from a pavilion male and female figures were passing, thin ones shivering as they crept along it in dripping bathing dresses, the fat ones smiling and satisfied. Men with straw hats on the backs of their heads, and dark coats open lolled on the shingle, idly throwing stones, or watching the most pleasant bathing girls. Several rowing boats packed with human beings were being lazily rowed about on the swell by boatmen for five shillings an hour; others were going a short way out to sea in motorboats, some to beseech the pilot to put back to dry land as soon as possible. Rival boatloads of longhaired weedy men in striped shirtsleeves and collars were having races, sometimes converging and bumping. Children with oiled-silk and mackintosh coverings on their lower garments were paddling in the spent waverush and mechanically filling tin pails with pebbles and dried seaweed in order to empty them, making as much noise as possible. Children of a mentality less immature ran with daring in the backwash of a wave, imploring benign parents to witness their extraordinary daring and adventurous deeds. Adolescents, trousered and skirted, sat upon the groins and the piles shortly to be washed by a higher sea, those in trousers chucking seaweed at the girls, and the skirted ones cheeking the boys.

Jonquil and William sat near a man asleep in the

sun with a handkerchief spread over his face. Jonquil giggled at the thought of tickling his head with a gull's feather, and he whispered to her that she must not be naughty. But Jonquil was determined to tickle the head of the sleeper, and crept on hands and knees towards him, holding the feather in her teeth as though it were a dagger. William leaned sideways and grabbed a foot; she squealed and tried to kick away the restraining hand. Firmly he pulled her back to him, saying that he was a giant. This delighted her more than the idea of tickling a man's head, and she asked to be told a story.

"About Swallow Brow," she insisted.

He began a variation of the fable told on the Leas, but Jonquil insisted on hearing again the same story. So he told it to her, lowering his voice as two girls returning from the sea tiptoed past them. Jonquil's face showed an excited distress when he described the placing of the swallow in the cage, and her eyes brimmed with tears. As he was concluding the happy fantasy by telling her that a dream swallow would live in her heart for so long as she was kind to other little children, he turned without any motive or desire, and looked behind. The two girls were sitting on the pebbles a few yards away. Both were about twenty years old; a fair girl holding a towel round her, and a girl wringing seawater from black hair that lay thickly on white shoulders and scarlet bathing dress.

They had not seen him. Jonquil, with a gentle smile on her lips, was still thinking of her swallow. He did not want to be seen by the girls, and yet even as he contemplated going away a desire for companionship upbrimmed within him. He sat still, looking

seawards, ready to hear what they might say. Almost at once the clear voice of Elsie Norman said,

"You are an awful ass not to wear a cap, Jo. Your hair will split at the ends. It's your great asset, you know. Besides, it gets so coarse."

And the reply of the other,

"Oh, it's a nuisance. I shall have it cut, I think."

"My dear, you would look horrid. And it would be unfair to yourself."

"Why? I've no cavalier to displease."

"But you never know your luck."

The dark girl did not answer. Jonquil jumped up from his side, and William heard the chafe of her feet on the pebbles.

"Why, it's Quillie!" said the girl in the red bathing dress.

"Who's that with her?" the voice of Elsie enquired. William knew that they were looking at him, and presently Elsie was speaking to the child, asking her where her mother was, and had she run away from Martha again.

"Martha went to have one, so Quillie went and found Willum. And Willum says a swallow's in Quillie's heart. And Quillie's been riding on an owl's wings. Hasn't I, Willum?"

He ignored them, pretending not to have heard.

"Whatever does the child mean?" demanded Elsie, with bewilderment.

"Why, look!!" said the dark girl, with subdued excitement, speaking rapidly.

William imagined that she was pointing at him.

"What do you mean, Jo? That man?"

"Can't you see?"

"Don't speak so excitedly, my dear. He may be listening."

William felt that all three were now staring at his back.

"Can you hear, Mr. Willie Maddison?" she called softly.

He turned round.

"It is Willie, Jo!"

"Hullo, Elsie," he said.

"Whatever are you doing here, of all places?"

"Oh, I came here."

"But your father said you were living on the coast near Barnstaple, learning to farm or something. You look just the same!"

"So do you."

"You know Mary Ogilvie, don't you, Willie?"

He looked down at the girl in the wet scarlet bathing dress crouching by his feet. With her hand she brushed the long wet black hair from throat and shoulders, looking up at him, and tossing it behind her neck. Her mouth was slightly opened, and she smiled, so that he saw the tip of a red tongue and the white teeth.

"Hullo, Mary. I met a friend of yours two or three days ago. And I've just remembered that I accepted an invitation for yesterday, and didn't turn up. A little lady called Diana Shelley."

"Diana! Where?"

"She was at Cryde Bay."

"I know it awfully well."

She smiled swiftly up at him, and began to wring her hair. Some drops of seawater fell on Jonquil, who cried out,

"Damn you, Jo!"

"O Quillie!" said Mary.

"Quillie doesn't care a ——"

"O Baby," said Mary, putting her arms around her; "you've said that to me before. Look at the butterfly!" laying her cheek against the child's.

Jonquil clapped her hands, and pointed to the white butterfly that was drifting about over the heads of the holiday crowd. "Tell Quillie a story of a butterfly," she pleaded.

"You must ask Willie."

"W-Willum, tell Quillie the story."

"Later on."

"No, now."

"I don't know it yet."

"Why not?"

"Go away from me," said William with sudden irritation, pushing her.

Jonquil pouted, and kicked him.

"Naughty piccaninny!" said Mary.

"Temper!" echoed Elsie.

Jonquil opened her mouth and cried, struggling and kicking when Mary tried to comfort her. She struck her on the cheek, but Mary, wincing only a little, continued to whisper that she must not be naughty.

"Quillie will! Quillie will! Dam Jo! Quillie hates Jo, an W-Willum, an Martha—whip Quillie. She's naughty—whip Quillie!"

"What an awful temper," said Elsie. "Spiteful little thing. I wouldn't pander to her if I were you, Jo. You're too soft-hearted. The child wants discipline. No wonder, with such a mother!"

Jonquil lay on the pebbles, quiet now, abandoned to shaking sobs. Mary sat and watched her. Then she looked up into William's face, and he saw that her eyes were big with tears.

“What do you mean, ‘with such a mother?’ ” asked William, coldly.

The two girls looked at him. Jonquil had ceased her sobbing and was playing with two pebbles, and waving her feet in the air. She began to sing to them as though they were dolls.

“Poor stones, nice stones, always by the waves, talking to the sea, so dry and hot. Poor stones, dear stones, Quillie puts you in her hand.”

Elsie said slowly: “Her mother has recently returned from Cryde Bay. Did you meet her there?”

He nodded, looking at Jonquil.

Mary said, “Come on, Elsie, let’s get our things on.”

They picked their way nimbly over the pebbles, and he squatted by Jonquil. She ignored him and went on singing to the stones. Mary Ogilvie was dressed first, and ran to them holding shoes, stockings, and towel in her hand. She sat down with the tiny form of the child between them.

“Have you bathed to-day?”

“Not yet, Mary.”

“Isn’t it nice to see all these people so happy?”

She began to dry a foot, bending her leg, so that her brown knee with the scar he remembered was exposed. A wild-eyed man passed them with a tray of bananas, oranges, sweets, chocolates and cheap magazines. “Would you like anything?” he asked Mary, who refused, thanking him with a quick glance. Jonquil made no reply to him, so he bought her a four-penny orange and placed it by her. The man moved on, hoarsely muttering his wares.

“Many years since I saw you last, Willie.”

“It seems unreal, that last day, even now.”

“Up by the Roman encampment?”

"Yes."

"There's a Roman encampment here, but it's the centre of picnicking parties. Not solitary like that wild and lovely hill above Rookhurst."

Her feet were dry, and she began to pull on a stocking. He looked across the water, seeing small yachts and boats with rubied lugsails. A seaplane droned above, and from the head of the pier half a mile eastwards floated a brazen curl of music.

"Don't you think Diana Shelley beautiful?" Mary said, pulling the brown stocking over her knee, and swiftly fastening it under her skirt.

"Very. But she seemed strange."

"Everyone says that. But it hides shyness and reserve. She only lives for music. What did she say?"

"Oh, not very much. She asked me to lunch, I forget where——"

"Monks' Orchard. It's quite near our place."

"Yes, that was the name. But I forgot to go."

"She will be disappointed."

"I don't think so. She only asked me because I admitted I knew you."

"Then I wasn't quite forgotten! One field post-card in, let me see, nearly five years. You must be twenty-two. You were seventeen then. What an awful fool you must have thought me, talking to you as I did!"

"I remembered it afterwards, and was grateful. War broke out five days after I arrived in London, and I joined the Yoemanry with Jack Temperley. He was killed in Gallipoli."

"My brother Michael was killed at the Hohenzollern Redoubt."

"He was in the Scots Guards, wasn't he?"

She nodded, and in silence finished pulling on the other stocking. Then she asked, after a very small hesitation, if he was stopping at Findlestone for long.

"I don't know," he answered.

The seaplane passed with a humming roar just over the crowd, and hundreds of faces caused the beach to shift its freckled and variegated colour. Mary and William looked up at the same moment.

"Are you staying with Major Fairfax?"

"No. I just thought I would come to Findlestone."

He rose to meet Elsie, who looked very fresh and pretty in a linen dress, blue as her frank, friendly eyes. The sunlight burnished her hair, fairer now than when the thick plait had hidden the gold. She wore a betrothal ring, he noticed.

"Sorry to have kept you so long, my dears. How about some tea? Jonquil, are you going to be a nice little girl, and come home with us to have some cakes?"

Jonquil, having buried the orange, was interested in a cork.

"She'll come," said Mary.

William and Elsie moved off, to be followed by Mary and an obedient child. They walked across the lower road, and up the path through the pines.

"What do you think of Mrs. Fairfax, Willie?"

"I thought her quite nice. A bit unconventional, perhaps."

"Yes, many people think that. Daddy used to paint her as a child, you know."

"Really?"

"Her portrait was hung in one year's Academy, and bought by Major Fairfax's father. Funny coincidence, wasn't it? For afterwards the son married the original. She was only sixteen, and he was more than

double her age. They married almost immediately—just before the outbreak of war. He had spent years in the Sudan. It's too young, really, to be married at sixteen, for a girl cannot possibly know her own mind at that age. What do you think?"

"No."

"Of course she cannot. It's too young to expect a girl to settle down. Then came the war, and he went to fight, and she was left alone down here with her relatives. But I suppose you know old grandfather Fairfax and the two aunts, don't you?"

"No."

"Well, I expect you will before long. You don't look very fit, Willie, as you ought, living in Devon. You look quite dark under the eyes. Perhaps it's the sun. You ought to wear a hat, you know. You had sunstroke once when you were a boy, didn't you?"

"No, that was Jack."

"Of course. Poor old Jack! You and he were friends, weren't you? Don't you miss him?"

"Yes," he sighed.

"Poor Willie!" Her tone of sympathy assuaged a little his inward despair.

"How is your father, Willie?" she asked, as they walked up the path to the Leas.

"I don't know. I haven't seen him or heard from him since I left Rookhurst at the beginning of the year."

"What a pity you aren't more to each other. But you never did get on very well, did you? Neither of you have had a proper chance. But he's very proud of you, Willie. You should have heard him talking to daddy about you during the war."

"But I did nothing particular during the war."

"But you did. You won the Military Cross and the Croix de Guerre."

"Valueless. Ask the dead."

"Morbid still! At any rate we are all proud of you at Rookhurst. Your name is hanging in the Church porch, on an illuminated scroll. Now, don't go and do anything to spoil that decent record, will you? Take the advice of an old friend, Willie, and keep clear of any entanglement!"

"Why should I be in any entanglement?"

"No reason at all. I merely said mind you don't. Daddy was saying only the other day that he was sure you had the brain and the personality to do considerable things, if only you could find your feet. He said that just after you had left, when you and he had that long argument all the afternoon and evening. 'When Willie throws off the effects of the war he will go straight ahead.' That's what daddy said, and, you may be sure, he knows all right what he's talking about! He said you hadn't yet got the world quite in perspective. That's why I thought I'd give you a friendly piece of advice, and warn you not to think too much about people who aren't of any particular importance."

"Oh, I shan't."

They reached the top of the Leas, which was less crowded owing to a general desire for tea and ices. Elsie and William were joined by Mary and Jonquil, who was now laughing happily. They turned down a side-street leading to the High Street, and were about to cross the roadway when a long low yellow car shot past, the driver cutting out the exhaust so that it seemed to be emitting roaring coughs.

"Mummie!" shrieked Jonquil, but the car went past without Eveline seeing them.

She was sitting beside the driver, who was Lord Spreycombe. Behind sat the sailor called Tubby, and a small fair girl holding the bulldog by its spiked collar. They were laughing. William went with the two girls and Jonquil down the High Street, on the way to Elsie's house. They saw the car pull up about two hundred yards away, outside a large corner shop with

Wine and GEO. BOGSIDE *Spirit Merchant.*

in gilt letters over the shuttered windows. The place was without bunting or flag or decoration of any description.

Lord Spreycombe got out, followed by Eveline. She was dressed entirely in white, with a large white hat. Lord Spreycombe sought for something in the car, handing out several articles to Eveline, looking like small pails. She carried one towards the corner shop, and he followed with the two. William saw him bend down, lever off a lid, and rising again, he flung the contents of the tin over the shop front. This was repeated with the other tins. Great splashes of red, white and blue colours began to run down the shutters and the plaster front. Indifferent to the crowd of about a dozen spectators, Lord Spreycombe slung the empty tins of paint upward to a small roof, on which were several shrubs in tubs, above the shop where a gentleman was sitting with two ladies, apparently having tea. The gentleman happened to lean over just as the third can sailed upwards, so that it nearly struck him.

"What do this mean, my lord?" he called in a high angry voice; "what do this mean? Outrageous

behaviour for the son and heir of a peer o' the realm. I shall have the law on you, my lord."

"What's that you say, your washout? My dear chap, we're helping to decorate the ancient and horrible town of Findlestone. We are responding nobly to your washout's mayoral appeal to make the best display on this suspicious occasion; and, noticing that your washout omitted to decorate his own establishment, we considered it our duty, after cracking several bottles, to do it for your washout. And all responsibility must be put upon the perfervid exhortation of your appeal. No, don't wave your arm like that, or you will fall over. Your shop looks very nice indeed."

The onlookers gazed with admiration at the sight of Lord Spreycombe raising a grey bowler hat to his worship. The paints were slowly making their shapeless slides down the drab shopfront, while attenuated dribbles in advance of the main columns gave the appearance of string blinds hanging awry. When William was only a few paces from the yellow car Jonquil ran forward and threw her arms around her mother's skirts. Eveline with an exclamation of delight seized her under the arms and lifted her up, kissing repeatedly the small face.

"Quillie, darling, mother has missed her baby girl——" William heard her say, and then they were looking at each other. Immediately Eveline set down the child, and with a radiant delight she rushed up to him.

"Bill . . . ! Billy . . . !! You in Findlestone!!! My dear, but how perfectly splendid. Where are you staying? You must come home to tea and see Lionel. I've told him all about you, and we were thinking of

motoring over to pay you a visit. How nice to see your old face again! Let me look at you, old man. . . . But how long have you been here? And why haven't you been round to see me? And how did you come to know my little Jonquil?" She turned to the two friends, and with an extreme cordiality she greeted them. "What an extraordinary day of surprises and adventures! Do all you people know one another? Why, Bill, I had no idea that my friends were your friends! Elsie, have you known Willie Maddison for long?"

"About twenty years."

"Good heavings! Mary, dear——"

"Willum's been telling Quillie lovely stories, mummie!"

"I'm sure he has, darling, because he's half a fairy himself. How rude; I am forgetting all about my other friends." She turned to Lord Spreycombe, who was leaning on his elbow in an attitude of assumed tiredness against the wind-screen. "Naps, you know Miss Norman and Miss Ogilvie, don't you?"

Naps became upright, and, talking off his hat, he swung one lank leg across the other and made a low sweeping bow.

"The ladies and I are already acquaint!"

"This is Captain Maddison."

"H'r'y'u?" he enquired, raising his black semi-circular eyebrows, and holding out a limp hand. Eveline slapped it, telling him not to be sloppy. "He hasn't grown up yet," she said. "Miss Pamment"—speaking to the fair, slim girl in the car—"you know Miss Norman, don't you? Of course! And Captain Maddison, otherwise Bill? Tubby, bow to the ladies—Lieutenant

Sir John Lorayne. The bulldog's name is 'Oldfast, because he never has yet. Now you all know each other!"

"Don't forget Sir George Bogside, and the Misses Swamp!" whispered Lord Spreycombe, pointing to the group on the roof of the shop, who had resumed their tea in attitudes of stiff oblivion of the outrage.

"Naps, you impish creature!" said Eveline, and, smiling at the girl called Miss Pamment, "I must leave you before they put you in the lock-up. Good-bye, Miss Pamment! I shall see you at the hop to-night, shan't I? Cherrio, Tubby; don't forget to ask me for a dance, will you?"

"Mummie, can Quillie come to the dance, too?"

"No, my darling, little Quillie must go to bed, or she will lose the roses in her cheeks."

"Then can Willum take Quillie to the bonfire?"

"For a little while, perhaps, if Quillie is good and will sleep after tea."

"Thanks awfully," said Jonquil.

"Isn't she perfectly sweet, Bill?"

He looked into her eyes, which surely shone with love for him.

"Mummie, quick!" whispered the child. "Strewth, here comes some one I don't want to see. Hide me, dear people. Stand in front of me, Naps. Too late!"

Julian Warbeck approached. He strode quickly, in a straight line, his hands in the pockets of his jacket. His broad shoulders were hunched, and he was lost in some thought. When he saw the shopfront he stopped abruptly, scowled at the sight of the paints, and growled, "It is—hicco—pardon, raining at last, I perceive. Hicco—damn—how fine a rainbow!" He raised his hat solemnly to the doorhandle, spun round,

and glared at William, and said, "You—hicco—have my—hicco—my congratulations——"

"He's drunk," whispered Elsie Norman, and Warbeck heard her. He thrust his head forward, frowned so that his eyes were nearly hidden, hiccoughed, muttered a contemptuous, "Oh, well," rammed his hat on his head, and strode along his straight line, endeavouring to demonstrate, it appeared, his ability to walk perfectly upright. He marched unswervingly across the road, halted, turned to the right in the middle, and looking fixedly ahead, disappeared in the direction of the Leas.

"Following his Dog's Nose," murmured Lord S., but no other remark was made.

When the yellow car was gone, Eveline asked William to have tea with her, but he told her calmly that he had accepted already the invitation of Elsie Norman. Jonquil said that she had as well, but her mother decided that she must take the child home, which was done, with the child in tears.

CHAPTER III

19 JULY, 1919 (*Continued*)

MR. AND MRS. NORMAN said that it was a delightful surprise to see him, and during tea asked him many questions. Charlie Cerr-Nore was there, and William imagined by his devotional manner to Elsie that they were engaged to be married. "Old Pigface," the nickname given Charlie at school, seemed less inclined to like William than when they were boys, but Mrs. Norman did most of the talking. The name of Eveline was not mentioned again after Elsie had told them of the meeting with Jonquil and William on the beach, and later, of the wineshop episode. Mrs. Norman said that she thought it was "very bad form."

After tea he was left with Mary, sitting on a seat under a mulberry tree at one corner of the tennis lawn. Upon impulse he asked her to go for a walk with him on the Leas, and seek Billjohn. The crowd was increasing, the cheeks of the girls were red and shining with exertion and laughter, their hair untidy, ticklers and paper whisks in their hand ready to be thrust into any and every youngish male face. The elder men strolled with relaxed expressions, carelessly happy, hands in pockets, caps pulled over ears, smoking. Children brushed into them, scrambled round them, heedless of anything except the games they were playing. By the side of him stepped Mary, speaking

only when he spoke to her, wearing a panama hat and simple gown of tile-brown arabian silk with white collar. They walked past the bandstand, the middle of a vast pool of humanity, from which unaccountable concentric circles of deckchairs seemed to ripple with every kind of male and female face, dress and gesture. Many couples were dancing. The leader of the orchestra, a mixed one in hungarian dragoon jackets and obsolete French infantry pantaloons, was ostensibly unsteady upon his legs. Some of the performers appeared to be playing one tune, some to be playing another. They were in various conditions of inoffensive alcoholism. William and Mary stood and listened for a time, then continued their walk to the less frequented part of the Leas. Before them spread a wide and smooth expanse of grass, extending on the right till it reached a fence of red corrugated iron about eight feet high enclosing for some hundreds of yards many blocks of residential buildings, on the chimney pots of which rooks were perching. The houses had a drab and dreary appearance. She explained to him that the enclosure was the now evacuated Rest Camp of which his cousin had been adjutant.

He walked on in silence while the din made by the band faded away behind them. The sun which all day long had seemed to be ripping a fierce silver furrow in the blue sky now appeared to have spent its rush in a gold fog which threw long shadows behind them. When they had passed the Rest Camp they came to an empty bandstand round which a few old people were quietly sitting. He noticed an ancient man in a bathchair with a sheepskin wrapped round his knees. At his feet was curled a fat cat with an enormous head. Near the old gentleman were sitting two elderly ladies,

both of them knitting, and one of them talking to a man wearing white flannels and idly spinning two tennis racquets as he sat on a reversed chair. William observed the large brown hands and the ease with which the strong fingers twirled topwise the racquets. He glanced at the approaching pair with blue eyes of an unusual lightness which was the more pronounced by the projection of the high cheekbones in a face sunburned and lean. He wore no hat; the fair hair was short and upright, with bald patches receding on each side of the temple. His nose was thick at the bridge, as though it had been broken, and had reset irregularly. Mary whispered swiftly that he was Major Fairfax, and immediately afterwards the man was on his feet and greeting her.

"Hullo, Mary! What have you been doing with yourself all day? Seen Lina?"

"We met her just before tea, Major. How d'you do, Mrs. Beayne—Miss Fairfax—Mr. Fairfax. Is your cold better?"

She spoke to the old man, after bowing to the elderly ladies.

"Worse. Worse," grumbled Mr. Fairfax. "This sea breeze is very damp. You'll catch a cold in that thin dress. What's that man's name?"

He pointed at William with a bony finger, and peered at him under eyebrows tangled and ragged and white. A black clerical hat with floppy brim was pulled down over his ears; a woolen muffler, after being wound several times round his neck, crossed the chest of his greatcoat and was tucked under his arms.

"What's that man's name?" he enquired again in a throaty voice. "Who is he? Where does he come from? Here, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy: don't go

away, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy. Milly, why don't you catch Tommy? Mind that dog over there—they'll fight, I know they'll fight!"

The old gentleman's irritated concern had been caused by the cat getting up, arching its back, yawning and jumping from the bathchair.

"That isn't a dog, my poor parent," said Mrs. Beayne compassionately. "That's a piece of newspaper."

"But you can't be too careful, my girl. A dog may be asleep under the paper. Here, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy: don't run away, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy."

He patted his knee under the sheepskin, but the cat ignored him, and squatting on its off hind leg commenced to scratch with its near hind. Having loosened the parasitic cause of itching, it shook it from its own skin so that it fell on to the sheepskin, unnoticed. Then it strolled away in order to fascinate some sparrows who were hopping round the bandstand. The old man's eye followed it proudly.

"Exercise is good for Tommy," he mumbled.

His daughter was smiling at William, and Major Fairfax was looking amused. Mary said, with quick shyness,

"Mrs. Beayne, Miss Fairfax—this is Willie, I mean Captain Maddison."

Miss Fairfax made a conventional murmur, and Mrs. Beayne, a tall woman wearing tortoiseshell spectacles, with a face still beautiful, addressed him in a deep, broken-musical voice.

"How do you do? Now, tell me, do, are you any relation to that poor little man, Phillip Maddison?"

"Oh, yes, are you?" asked her unmarried sister.

"He is my cousin."

"Fancy that!" exclaimed Miss Fairfax, taking off her spectacles. "Now, really, I do see some resemblance. Now, tell us, Captain Maddison, where is Phillip? Do you know, he was a constant visitor to the house, and he never came to say good-bye! We are so hurt, aren't we, Margery?" appealing to her sister.

"Oh, very hurt. Your poor heart was quite broken, Milly. As for dear Eveline, she was inconsolable."

During the pause Mary introduced William to Major Fairfax, and the two men shook hands.

"My wife has told me about you, Maddison, and about your Devon seascapes. I suppose you've been to the house and seen her? When did you arrive?"

"Oh, I haven't seen the house yet—but I've been to her—I mean, I haven't been to the house, but I've seen her," stammered William. "I saw her in the town with Jonquil. You see, I only arrived this morning."

"But what about all your birds and animals? Did they arrive this morning?" asked Mrs. Beayne.

"No, they've all gone away and left me. I brought one spaniel with me, but I lost him this morning."

"Oh, the poo-oor little man!" said Mrs. Beayne, "how wery, wer-ry sad!" Her voice assumed a nasal, moaning tone that was produced from the back of the nose, with long drawn compassion, "what a werry sad holiday for the poo-oor bow-wow! Where was the little man lost, and does he know master's address?"

"His name is Billjohn, and I lost him in the High Street."

"But you must go to the Police Station."

"I daren't."

"Ho, ho," said Mrs. Beayne. "It's as bad as that, is it? Bashing constables?"

He recounted his drive in the cab, and they all laughed except the old gentleman, who was too intent on watching his cat. Major Fairfax did not refer again to the meeting of his wife with William in Devon, and he felt less apprehensive. Constantly he looked at the face of Eveline's husband; he was entirely different from the mind's picture he had formed.

"He was a brigadier-general under Allenby in Palestine," Mary told him when they had left them, "and sometimes Eveline still talks of him to strangers as 'my husband, the general.' He's an awfully decent man, but I do wish——"

She would not complete what she was going to say, although he asked her twice. They walked towards the gold-dewy sunfall which was charging the mists over the sea. William walked with downward glance caring nothing for the beauty that gave such joy to Mary. Past the big red brick Grand Hotel with its shining glass conservatory they walked, past its rival the Majestic Hotel, now atrophied since it was still commandeered by the War Office, although it had been empty of members of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps for several months. They came to open fields, where a great mass of timber was piled for the bonfire that night. They turned southwards to the sea, and sat on the edge of the cliff ragged with coarse grasses, poppies, and blue devilsbit scabious. Tussocks of thyme grew down the sandstone slope, murmurous with wild bees singing on the purple flowerlets. A kestrel hawk was hovering in the field behind them. Mary looked eagerly towards the golden luminousness of the horizon, as though wishful of absorbing the life in the light, of drinking the wind. Once she looked at her companion, in wonderment at his heedless attitude,

at his dejection. To her came the same distress that she had felt as a very small child when at a tea-party she had seen him forlorn and miserable, and which in after years she had felt when sitting with him beside the tumulus on the downs above Rookhurst. She wanted firmly to tilt his head, and to turn it with her hands towards the western glory, so that it should enter into him and make him happy.

"Mary."

"Yes, Willie."

"Do you know if it is to be a fancy dress at the Grand Hotel to-night?"

"It's optional, I think."

"Would you like to come?"

"I'm going with my aunt."

He turned away as he spoke, and she wondered why he had asked her. She was going to thank him for inviting her when a brown fieldmouse climbed up the rough stem of a wild mallow growing just below them on the slope, and commenced to nibble the flower. The creature faced them, unafraid, because they made no movement. On seeing it William lost his apathy.

"Look at that mouse," he whispered.

"I've seen it."

"Don't move."

The mouse squatted among the veined purple flowers of the mallow, nibbling the hearts of the blossoms. With small paws it pulled off the petals, working with quiet earnestness. A bumblebee burred to the plant, and it leapt up and snapped at it, and having missed with its sharp teeth, continued to tear away the reproductive organs of the plant. The labours ceased abruptly, and the mouse froze all movement. Looking slowly upward, they saw that the kestrel had espied

the mouse, and was resting on the breeze about ten yards above the edge of the cliff, its barred tail and wings spread, and head pointing downwards. The filaments of wing and tail feathers were nearly transparent, and red as though pulsing with blood; the light seemed to have fired the bird, and every featherlet ruffled by the wind was like a flicker of flame against the blue sky.

The mouse never moved; one paw was upraised. Down slid the kestrel, beating wings and depressing the fan of its tail until it was balanced once more on the moving air, leaning forward on the wind and resisting its uptread in the wing pockets.

He felt Mary's hand clutch his knee. She was in an agony for the mouse's danger. The black eyes of the blossom-spoiler were fixed in unwinking terror. If it made the slightest movement, the hawk would descend. Flinging up his arms, he shouted; Mary's cheek was struck violently; the hawk swerved and swooped away; the mouse leapt from his leafy platform and was lost in the grassy runs below.

"Mary, I'm so sorry. What a brute I am! Do forgive me!"

He had hurt her, for there was the mark of his blow slowly raising a stain on her cheek, yet she made no sign that she was hurt. She would not look at him, so remorsefully he put his hand on her shoulder. She stiffened, but relaxed, and smilingly turned to him. He saw the tears in her eyes.

"I am glad it escaped," she said.

Gently the dying wind tossed the ragged grasses, shaking the poppies, and waving the heads of the scabious. She sat very still and upright; the hand was removed from her shoulders. He spoke no more;

the humming of the bees at the thyme came to them. Soon they rose, and climbed down to the sea.

As the sun fell lower the golden fume became thicker, and the sea-breeze wavered. Mary wanted to talk about birds, but his apathy seemed to have returned, and with it the curious distress to herself.

The dance was not mentioned again, even when they passed by the Grand Hotel on their return and he stopped to read the notice boards leaning against the door. On the pavement as they walked past the Leas houses the heels of Mary went *clippety clop, clippety clop*, and realizing that he was noticing it, a hot colour flushed her cheeks, and she quickly explained that the noise was due to the iron tips on her heels.

"They wear out so quickly," she said.

When they returned to the Normans' house Elsie noticed the red mark on Mary's left cheek and asked her how it had happened. He told her, with additions by Mary, of the mouse and the hawk, and Elsie seemed to be amused by the excitement of Mary as she described the saving of it.

"You and your old mouse," she said with good-natured tolerance. "You're just like Willie."

"Funny old Elsie!" said Mary, a sweet luminousness in her face, which the other girl impulsively kissed. "I must run away now, or I shall be late."

"I'll come with you," suggested William, eager to leave the house.

"Thanks, but don't bother," replied Mary, and, with a winsome look, she was gone.

"She's a funny kid," said Elsie to Charlie, as the door banged.

CHAPTER IV

19 JULY, 1919 (*Continued*)

HE left the Normans as soon after supper as he could, and wandered with the crowd towards the fields beyond the asphalted Leas. He searched every face, but found not the one he looked for. He had a desire to drink, in order to drive out pain that became savagely inflamed in the dark, and went back to the town. But the bars were crowded by shouting soldiers, sailors and civilians; and after waiting for ten minutes, and seeing a fight between a drunken American sergeant boasting about the war and a drunken civilian wearing the silver badge of disablement, which ended in the American being scragged by half a dozen drunken British soldiers, he went into the High Street, lit by electric arc-lamps that above the heads of the people were spluttering and shooting out the stark and coppery lights. He meandered down several streets, coming eventually to the railway bridge, and passing onwards, he reached a wide Roman roadway that led through a plain to where were grouped acres of empty Canadian hutments. The way led to the downs, now dimly dark against the northern summer sky. Sometimes he stopped, harkening to the faint roar that rose with the glow of Findlestone's rejoicing, and was passing, ghostly, across the lightless huts. Onwards again, with Capella glimmering just above the hill

line, as though it were a lantern held for his guidance by some wandering shepherd. Over a fence at the foot of Cæsar's Camp, a blundering through brambles and past flints rolled ages since from the summit, a laboured climb up the steep sides, until Capella was hidden behind the ramparts, leaving him with the Lion and the Bear, the Dragon and the Swan. Rests in the coarse grasses, then upwards until the summit was reached. He stood on the rampart seeing the promenade lamps like a snake glittering every scale. Beyond, suspended in blackness, a battle cruiser suddenly became studded with yellow, as all her lights were switched on at every porthole. A white beam stretched out from among them, illuminating the pier, trailing over the houses, and swelling to a dazzling whiteness as it moved up Cæsar's Camp, causing a drove of feeding cattle to stampede in terror. The light-swelling, burst in blinding rays upon him, and he put his hands to his face; the dazzle swung away again, and seemed to be feeding the sky.

Some minutes afterwards the red-whiteness cleared from his sight, and he walked in darkness round the fosse. Unceasing in the long dry grasses the wind made its myriad lispings, rising and falling like the sighs of a lost generation come from the battlefields of Europe. The starlight made it possible to walk swiftly on the chalky down. Larks roosting in the tufts sprang up with frightened chirrups at his passing, and fluttered away in the dark to seek other crouching places. He remained with the field crickets and the stars while the rockets streaked upwards from the Leas, breaking at the pause of their curves into red and green showers. Véry lights, no longer needed by the detrenched army, soared with them, descending

in wavy pools of radiance and drooping like faded water lilies. Then at different points great serpent tongues of flame darted at the sky: the beacons were kindled. Horned owls screamed in the night wind as they hunted the vols and mice on these hills of the dead, where under the grassy mounds the bones of pagan men were buried; owls that made now, as then, the same cries as they dropped to clutch and crush the furred bodies. In reverie he fancied that some skinclad man had sat and dreamed here, long ages before the Romans threw up their earthworks; even now, some hillflower might be drawing colour and life from his calcined bones. Perhaps a Roman had mused here under the stars, pining for the olive groves and fireflies of the south, while the watchfires winked on the shore, and the galleys rode at anchor in the bay; helmet—breast-plate—short sword—the trieme he may have borne—his bones: all: all were dust. And here may have climbed some Canadian lad, uncomfortable in the night, sick for the wheat plains of his western home, for the lakes and mountains, and the orchards on the slopes above the Pacific—far from this northern sea, so cruel to those that served it, its waves shot-over and splinter-lashed, mournful with crying gull; guarding on its bed cracked submarine and rended battleship, skulls weed-grown in the breach of guns rusting in the deep green water. Ancient Briton and alien Roman, Saxon and Norman, Colonial and Englishman, all had breathed the salt winds of the hills, and pondered the star-meaning at night: were they of Something that strayed, and lingered awhile, and found itself again?

The solitary human on the hill sat with reverie, watching the flames below licking the night. A broken

pale circle surrounded the fires—these were the faces of the people who were rejoicing at war's end. His restless spirit urged him to descend the hill and to seek one face in the thousand, but he remained, for here the night was quiet and kind, like the patient and faithful death that found after earthly linger the weariest travelling morsel.

Later, pacing tranquilly the ambit, he found a dump of stakes and hurdles, left by a company of military engineers. Till he was fatigued by the carrying he bore many backloads to the earthwork, dropping them near a flagpost which marked the highest point. He sought some dried furze, and set light to the beacon. At once the wind carried the golden flame-rush from spike to spike, with hissing crackle and floating spark. The pinewood stakes soon fired up; he brought more hurdles, heaving them on, then sat down and smoked.

He sat by the fire, celebrating Peace Night on the hills of the dead, alone with the field crickets that sang to the heat, a straying moth, and the timid steers snuffling and peering at the edge of the fireglow. Embers were blown bright by the wind and then wasted. On the Leas the bonfires were still brightly burning; at intervals up and down the coast dull white blotches spread in the sky. These were the naval flares, each a million candle-power, which once had burned the night long on the Calais Dover boom. Wherever he looked inland the dark earth in a hundred places was speckled with fire. The nearest beacon was three miles away, but he could see the curl and twist of the wild flames breaking skywards. Northwards, eastwards, westwards, whithersoever he looked, the beacons were burning—tokens of joy at England's ended darkness. He pitched the unburnt ends on his own

fire, which flamed immediately, and sudden emotion choked his throat and sight: he felt that the spirits of dead warriors were with him. Sheep and cattle shuffled in the darkness beyond the fire, and from the grass came a million sighs that stirred the flames, and passed into darkness again.

CHAPTER V

19 JULY, 1919 (*Continued*)

SOME time later he arrived at the big bonfire in a field adjoining the grounds of the Grand Hotel. Some of the spectators were lying on the grass in attitudes of abandonment. Only a few small boys braved the heat of the ruddy mass and dared to venture within a fifty-foot radius. Several young civilians and soldiers, overcome by heat and drink, were asprawl on the ground.

He saw the big face of Julian Warbeck in the crowd, and, going near, discovered that he was talking to a lank individual of about fifty years of age, wearing a monocle, and a very small cap that looked like a school-boy's. Even Warbeck's face was welcome in that lonely crowd, and William stood behind them, waiting for an opportunity to speak. Warbeck was saying, in his gruff voice:

"Well, Mr. Dodder, well, I care nothing for what you say. I think—yes, I think—that for you, without erudition or intuition, to pronounce an opinion on Swinburne—on *anyone*"—he spoke with anger—"I think, by god, yes, I think that it is an insolence that is intolerable."

"I merely remarked that Swinburne, in youth never seemed to have innocently enjoyed himself. Furthermore, my young friend, I was reading the poet before you were born."

"And don't you think he is with Shakespeare?"

"I do *not*."

"Oh, well. Um."

"Now, don't let us quarrel. Won't you just come to my house—it's only a step away—and have a friendly little cup of coffee?"

"Have you no barley water?" enquired Warbeck sarcastically. "I am afraid that coffee would fly to my head, and then I should be so brilliant that I would put the fire out. But, seriously—coffee!!"

"Well, perhaps, as it is Peace Night, I might find a glass of oporto."

"An excellent disinfectant against melancholy, sir!"

The elder man laughed, or rather from his lips stretched back from his yellow teeth came a series of sounds like *tee-hee*.

"That, my young friend, I think is the wittiest thing I've heard you say to-night."

"It was a third-rate remark," said Warbeck contemptuously.

They moved away and William watched their departure. Mr. Everard Dodder, a younger brother of Mr. Archibald Dodder, was a cadaverous man dressed in a black norfolk coat, with schoolboyish knickers, stockings, and white spats. He carried a little stick as though he were a lady and the stick were a hair found in a plate of soup. As he walked he lifted high his feet.

They passed round a segment of the fiery circle, and Warbeck left his sticklike companion, to stride rapidly towards a group of people who had just moved into view. The leader was a lady whose face shown whitely in the ruddy light which plied its rays upon the ermine cloak she held wrapped about herself. Two men

strolled immediately behind her, one in a dinner jacket, hatless, and hands in pockets; the other a figure that brought from the onlookers a startled murmur of admiration. The figure of a man, sooty black, his face obscured by a mask, in trunk hose, doublet and cape; carrying on shoulder an executioner's axe with crimson haft and polished head that gleamed bloody with the play of firelight. To the lady Warbeck raised his hat, bowing low, and began to speak. She seemed amused by what he said, for she lightly struck him with the brown fan she carried. After a short pause William went to her, behind Mr. Everard Dodder, who with his slight stoop, round shoulders, and hands behind his back, appeared to be searching the ground for something lost.

"Ha, ha," said Mr. Everard Dodder. "I'm so glad you're so innocently enjoying yourselves, what?"

Eveline darted past him, and whispered to William, while giving his wrist a quick squeeze. "Dear one, where have you been?"

The soft voice, and the agony of caress in it, made him incapable of speech; the beautiful face, with the eyes so tender, filled him with despair.

"Billy, come into the dance. I'll get rid of Naps and Lionel. Lionel's the one in a dinner jacket. Remember you're supposed to be a painter. Now, come, darling boy." Aloud she said, "Rot; of course you can come. Fancy mooning about all alone! Lionel, this infant's lost. He's coming in to dance."

"H'llo, Maddison," said Major Fairfax. "Alone? My dear chap! Where are your pals?"

"I haven't any, sir."

"What about us, m'dear old chap. Come into the dance. Everything merry and bright."

"But I can't come in these things," he exclaimed, looking at his clothes.

"You can come as an oddmedodd, my dear William—you're absolutely the part!" said Eveline.

"Come and crack a bottle of bubbly, Maddison. The place is absolutely flowing with it."

"That seems to indicate that the Old Country is all right at last, sir," said Warbeck, rubbing his hands together.

"I'm so glad they're so innocently enjoying themselves, what, Lord Spreycombe?" approved Mr. Everard Dodder, smoothly, looking sideways at him through the monocle.

"I'm so glad you're so glad," retorted Lord Spreycombe, swinging his executioner's axe. "Coming in, Major? The plebs begin to gape. Mrs. Fairfax?" He offered his arm, and they walked away through the people, who respectfully made way for them. Major Fairfax and William followed.

By the entrance of the hotel Eveline twirled round, snapping her fingers, cried *Voilà!* gave her husband a ravishing smile, and said to William, "Bill, I quite forgot! I've found, what do you think?"

"A grocer that doesn't sell bad bacon?" he said, trying to be lively.

"Be serious. I found what you've lost."

"Not Billjohn?"

"Yes!"

"Where is he?"

"At home. My dear, he came up to me soon after I left you this afternoon, wagging his little stern, and awful glad to see me. Aunt Margie—you've met her, haven't you?—has lost her heart to him. Now, bant I a prayer maid tew vind un, midear?"

During this rapid talk Lord S. had sauntered into the hotel. Major Fairfax looked at her with an admiring pleasure, as she bent forward from the step above them, holding her cloak around her knees with her left hand, her bright glance passing from William to her husband, and back again.

"I'm awfully glad about Billjohn," said William. "Would you like him?"

"Rather!"

"You can have him."

"But you must want him for yourself. I'll tell you! You walk him out for me: remember, you may want to give him away to someone else shortly!"

They entered the lounge of the hotel, on the sofas of which men and women were sitting, all talking, most of them smoking cigarettes, many of them laughing without restraint. A few men in evening clothes, some with ties loose and hair dishevelled, and others in fancy dress, stood in groups, holding glasses in their hands, and talking loudly to girls and women, also holding glasses or eating ices. A dance had just finished. Major Fairfax said that William must be thirsty, and led the way to a room.

"Help yourself, Maddison," he said, handing him a plate of sandwiches and a glass of champagne, "have some wine. Beaded bubbles winking at the brim, what? Nothing like it. By jove, it's a blessed change from everlasting whiskey. Ever been out East?"

"Only during the war, sir. Gallipoli, and afterwards, France."

"Wonderful show, Gallipoli! Read Masefield's book? Unforgettable, like the landing at Suvla. Lost most of my pals there—stout fellows, b'god. Have some more

wine! Merry crowd here, aren't they? War forgotten. Wish I could forget. Yet I don't think I want to. Which way did Spreycombe go? Oh, here he is, with Lina. Shall I pour you another glass, m'dear?" he asked her, in a friendly and courteous voice.

"I am still about seven off that capacity you warned me to observe."

"How about you, Spreycombe? Back teeth submerged yet?"

"Lud, no," drawled the executioner, raising his mask, and showing the slanting eyes. "Thanks v'y much. D'luck!" drinking to him.

William was proud to be seen in Eveline's company. He noticed that women standing or sitting near appeared to be appraising her; and the glances of some were coldly critical. He knew as they spoke to their companions that they were discussing her. She seemed to be unaware of other women's notice as she stood so naturally and easily with the frosty wineglass in her hand, her small brown shoes close together. The crown of her head was adorned with vine-leaves of autumnal tone, and her auburn hair was unbound and falling down her back and over her right shoulder. She wore a sleeveless, faded garment of Rose du Barri, which was torn from the supporting left shoulder-strap, so that the front fell diagonally across her bosom and the white bodice was seen. Her waist was girdled by a narrow brown sash after the original of her attire, which was one of Romney's portraits of Emma Hamilton as a Bacchante.

"Billy, take your eyes off me. Haven't you seen my neck and shoulders before?" she whispered by his side, as she offered him a plate of Gentleman's Relish sand-

wiches. "Go on, eat all you can. It's lovely to see you so happy. Do you like my fancy dress? But wait till you see Mary Ogilvie in her tartan!"

"I don't want to see anyone but you."

"You mustn't talk like that! Have some more wine. Don't you think Naps looks perfectly bloody with his skinny legs? I'm a bit tight, Billy. I want to kiss you! I do! Billy, his sister is here, but she won't know me, but I'm not worrying. Her ladyship's rigged out as Queen Elizabeth. Billy, I feel absolutely tight. Do I look it? Ask me for a dance, won't you?"

"All of them!"

"Good evening, Mrs. Fairfax," said a quiet voice near them. It was the fair girl who had been sitting in the car that afternoon. Sir John Lorayne was with her, in the uniform of an admiral of the Royal Navy a hundred years ago, a patch over one eye, a telescope under an arm.

"My dear Horatio!" exclaimed Eveline, "from what shades have you come to meet your old love?"

"Oh, I've been having a quick one round at the bar. Emma," replied Lord Nelson.

"He insists on dancing with you, Mrs. Fairfax," said Miss Pamment, "so I brought him along."

"May I have the honour? I've lost my dance-programme."

"You may. I've lost mine, too—my programme, I mean, not my honour. I've still got that, my lord. I can give you the next, if you like. Don't you think Bill is absolutely topping as an oddmedodd?"

Sir John Lorayne and Miss Pamment exchanged glances. Something gave a wild yell in the distance; it was the leader of the band giving a warning that the interval was at an end. Another musician banged the

big drum, a third blew a blast on the trombone. William swallowed the wine in his glass, and asked Miss Pamment if she would dance with him, receiving an unenthusiastic reply that she would love to.

"I'm going to dance, Major," he told Eveline's husband.

"Good fellow! You'll find me here afterwards."

He moved with the crowd through an archway, and came to the ballroom, ablaze with electric light, coloured balloons, and festoons of paper chains. With a crash of tinpots and other unconventional instruments the band started. He saw that the orchestra consisted of Negroes.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Miss Pamment, golden haired and slim in a gown of bronze and gold taffetas. She paused with his arm round her waist, and looked with innocent surprise into his face.

"What extraordinary music, Miss Pamment!"

"It's a jazz."

"What's that?"

"It has just come over from America. Don't you think it rather thrilling?"

"I think it's fine. Let's dance!"

"Rather!"

He was light on his feet. The beat of the music provided a rhythm that led them away airily as one of the balloons swaying over their heads. He was wildly happy. All the orchestra grinned at the dancers. One Negro playing the piano yelled to him as he passed, *I sure am some ivory rattler, bo'!* and his white teeth flashed. Another banged a bass drum, rattled bones, clashed cymbals, and thumped a row of tinpots; three were playing banjos, and a dusky Negress was playing a wind instrument that sent the most heartbroken

wails above the din and clatter. They were continually bumped into by other couples: when this happened he usually apologised and received a spontaneous apology from the man, but often a haughty stare from the women. He was not looking where he was going, owing to a desire to see Eveline. When after the dance and the encore demanded by handclapping he was sitting with Miss Pamment in an alcove, she explained the reason.

“You see, Captain Maddison, it hurts to be bumped if you are a woman, and, besides, we have a dread of appearing untidy in public. A girl would rather be starving than slovenly. Men are not so fastidious, are they?” She smiled, and he wondered if she were referring to his worn shoes, flannel trousers, old tweed coat, and the faded school tie of red, black, and yellow bars; certainly she did not appear to have noticed the oddmedodd’s attire.

“John seems to be happy, doesn’t he?”

He looked across the empty floor, and saw that he was standing above Eveline, who was seated, and laughing at something she said. The woman on William’s right, an angular Pierette, was discussing them with her partner, and he heard her say—“No one seems to know who she was before her marriage. She is curiously reticent about that point. But I should say she was hardly out of the top drawer! Posing all the time, my dear. Fancy coming in a costume like that!”

Miss Pamment heard as well, for she smiled at him, and whispered, “The voice of envy, Captain Maddison,” and he furiously nodded assent.

“Have you known Mrs. Fairfax very long, Miss Pamment?”

"No, I've only just met her. But Lionel Fairfax we've known for ages."

"And has Sir John known her long?"

"A week, I think."

"I imagined that Mrs. Fairfax and he were old friends, since he came as Lord Nelson."

"An absolute coincidence," she replied immediately, and went on in her demure voice, "Mrs. Fairfax has a genius for making friends quickly. The conventions that enslave us ordinary folk have no chance to bind her. She has a great number of friends, and not a few enemies, I fear! Have you known her long, Captain Maddison?"

"Oh, yes. Are you great friends with Lord Spreycombe, Miss Pamment?"

"Not awfully much. He lives near my grandfather's place, and I've met him there, with his old father, Lord Slepe. John's younger brother, who was killed in the war, was Naps' fag at Eton. Are you an O.E.?"

"No, I went to Colham School."

"Oh, really? Isn't that where Rupert Bryers, the poet who was killed in Gallipoli, went?"

"He was a great friend of mine, Miss Pamment, and once we planned to run away to America together."

He told her about the adventure, omitting the sad ending of it; and when the band commenced, Sir John Lorayne bowed to Eveline, and slid across the floor to Miss Pamment.

"Have you been enjoying yourself, John," she asked.

"Very diverting, old thing," he answered, "bit choppy though, so I thought I'd put back into harbour." He nodded and grinned at William, who bowed to him, then to Miss Pamment, and walked across the floor to

Eveline, around whom two young men were hovering. William went to her to claim the next dance.

"This is ours, I think, Lady Hamilton?"

"I think it must be, Lord Tornsox!"

"But, Mrs. Fairfax, you promised," exclaimed one of the young men, with straw-coloured hair and china-blue eyes, who was dressed as an Indian rajah, "the one before the supper dance, surely! I haven't got my programme—beastly bad form to have programmes."

"A Rajah and an Oddmedodd claimants for a dance with Emma Hamilton! What an embarrassment for her!"

The Indian rajah stubbornly stood before her, and looked disdainfully at William's garb. Giving him a swift and expressionless glance, William said to her, "There is no further embarrassment for you, Mrs. Fairfax," and, bowing, he went away to the bar and drank another glass of wine with Major Fairfax, who had just paid two guineas for his ticket.

"I see your pal Mary over there, Maddison," said Major Fairfax. "An awfully pretty girl, don't you think? Why not go and dance with her?"

"Perhaps she won't like to be seen with me in these clothes, sir."

"Rot, m'dear fellow. Don't you ever let trivial details upset you—although, of course, I quite understand that in this case it's out of consideration for a lady. Good lord, you fought and suffered for England, and this is the night of rejoicing. You toddle along, m'boy."

"But I don't know the lady with her."

"Come along o' me, m'dear chap. I'll soon put you right."

He took William to the two ladies sitting out in an

alcove, and introduced him to Mrs. Pamment, the mother of the girl with whom he had just danced, and the aunt of Mary Ogilvie. The band was playing a crashing tune which most of the five hundred dancers were humming as they moved round the parquet floor. William asked Mary if she would dance with him. She nodded and got up. She wore a tartan kilt and stockings, with red heels to her black buckled shoes, a short slashed waistcoat of black velvet over a shirtblouse with flowing white cravat. There was lace at throat and wrists. On her dark head she wore a bonnet with blackcocks' feathers, and the plaid over her left shoulder was fastened by a large brooch enclosing a cairngorm stone in a silver clasp wrought in the shape of a thistle. She stood slender and straight in her maidenly composure.

"Are you supposed to be anything special?" asked William, while they were dancing, trying to make conversation.

"Why, do you think a girl oughtn't to wear a man's clothes."

"Why not, if she wants to?"

"Well, you see, Willie, some people would say it wasn't done. Mother would be furious if she knew. But they were Micky's things when he was a boy, and I wore them in—sort of, well, I can't forget him, although it is such a happy evening."

"Is it?" muttered William, half to himself, and in his mind was lighted by memory a sombre picture of flame and smoke and shards upbursting from broken earth like the blown coaldust fire round an iron wheelhoop in a blacksmith's forge; and moving slowly in corpse rotten mud were men with faces toadstool-pale under their helmets, men with dislusted eyes, hollowminded

and beyond fear. They were men who had bidden farewell to wife, mother, child—who had loved the green fields, the evening-talk in some town tavern. They were entirely human, of no class or creed, of no race or nation.

He moved with the hectic throng, with the mass shuffling anti-clockwise to the bombilation of negroid music. Pierrots and Irish colleens, Gladiators and Chanticleers, Jesters and Quaker girls, Chevaliers and Newsboys, Charlie Chaplins and Milkmaids, Bohemians from the Quatier Latin and Butterflies, Fairies and Water Nymphs. Pale cheeks and sunbrown cheeks, painted cheeks and pencilled eyebrows, lamp-blackened lashes and blue-rubbed eyelids. Eyes that were sweet and young and gentle, eyes that were old and hard and ogling. Pupils shining with love and happiness; liquefied by belladonna and diminished by morphine sulphate. Blood-red lips and carmined lips, lustrous hair and dyed hair, hair in waist-long tresses and in plaits, hair false in coil and pad and gummed whisker-curl. Young and old, they sought personal happiness, he thought, one among pompoms a-swing and scarves floating above the sussuration of skirts and the sibilation of shoes. They clasped aloofly, firmly, tenderly, amiably, delightedly, abandonedly, round waists and shoulders and necks. The brilliant lights shone on the Peace Night revellers.

Afterwards they sat out in the palm court beside a fountain. Laughter and talk filtered from the lounge over the tiles and round the ferns. Through the glass framework the night sky glowed with the reflection of fire on the dewes descending.

“I suppose I’m the most disreputable person present,” he said suddenly. “A real oddmedodd!”

“What is an oddmedodd?”

“One of those creatures whom the winds roughen, on whom the rains fall. A scarecrow—whom men fix on a cross as a warning, but which even the thieving crows despise.”

“I think they are lovely things—like owls and stars. And children love them!”

She leaned forward and took his hand. It lay limp in her own, and then was quietly withdrawn. They sat still. She realized that once again she was thrusting the unwanted affection of friendship upon him. The pride in her heart that would have raised a barrier before any other man was overlaid and crushed by the desire to comfort him. She spoke to him no more as he sat huddled in a wicker chair, and when the beating of the big drum announced the supper dance, she got up and strolled in. He followed her, and she waited for him at the top of the marble steps leading to the lounge. In the candlelight she saw his face, and his eyes were contemplative and sad, filled with a pity for something infinitely beyond his personal compassion. He looked at her and smiled, and she stamped her foot and said:

“Why do you allow anyone to steal your happiness, Willie boy?”

They walked over the carpet of the lounge, strewn with cigarette ends, coming to the hall through which other couples from nooks and crannies were passing to the ballroom. He said, pretending to have mistaken her meaning,

“Yes, I was foolish to be worried by fancied remarks about my clothes.”

She glanced nervously at him, and said nothing. He felt a curious feeling of satisfaction at her agitation on

his behalf, which induced a sensation of relief, a moment's forgetfulness of Eveline, and an exceeding happiness. His eyes lit and his face became joyous.

"Come on, young Clippetty Clop, let's dance," he said.

By one of the fluted columns at the ballroom's entrance he saw Emma Hamilton talking and laughing with the Executioner, the Rajah, Lord Nelson, and Major Fairfax, all with wineglasses in their hands. He was free again. He turned joyously to Mary and clasped her without asking her permission. She allowed him to lead her away. During the dance she did not speak, feeling ashamed and snubbed, and wounded because he had chosen her not for her own self, but as a means (she thought) of making Mrs. Fairfax jealous. And the thought of Mrs. Fairfax's child came into her mind, making her angry; and then she blushed, and would not look at his face; and at the boisterous end of the dance she was despising herself.

Sir John Lorayne had managed to secure one of the few tables for his party, and while a crowd of men bore away plates and jugs and glasses to their ladies waiting patiently in ballroom, lounge, dining room, and even on the stairs, Mrs. Pamment and her daughter and niece sat down with the two men and her younger son, a merry schoolboy dressed as a cow-puncher and wearing round his waist a pair of revolvers, the hammers of which he was continually clicking. A manservant who, with tattooed wrists and torn ear, looked exactly what he was—a disguised A.B.,—was most anxious lest they should miss any dish, and brought them during the meal and in rapid succession plates of sandwiches of lobster, crab, salmon, cucumber, ham, tongue, chicken, and egg-and-cress; and then fancy

cakes, chocolate biscuits, shortbreads, dundee, madeira, and cherry cake. He fetched for their approval dishes of banana-custard, trifle, fruit salad, jellies and blanc manges, caramels and junkets. In his horny hands he held tall jugs of cut-glass with cider cup and claret cup, moselle cup and hock cup, all with ice floating in the amber and ruby liquids. Afterwards came pêche melba and strawberry or vanilla ices, and cold Mocha coffee, and Turkish cigarettes bought in "Constant." by Tubby himself.

"Well done, Harnett," said Tubby, nodding pleasantly at him; "now you go ashore and enjoy yourself."

"Very good, Sir John," replied A. B. Harnett, coming smartly to attention and instantly disappearing.

"I say, do look at that horror over there," said Miss Pamment in her demure voice, laying on his sleeve the fingertips of a brown hand slender as an otter's pad; "isn't she a scream?"

The cause of Miss Pamment's horror was an elderly woman sitting by herself in a corner. Her large fat face was patched in red where moisture had run through the powder like snow thawing on the tiled roof of a barn. A tortoiseshell comb in the pile of her yellow frizzy hair flashed with diamonds, as did the corsage of her purple gown and every joint, it seemed, of her fingers. She seemed to have no neck, and the folds of her quadruple chin rested forlorn and vast on her chest. She wore gold stockings and shoes.

"I've been watching her," continued Miss Pamment. "She hasn't had anything to eat. I suppose no man is brave enough to approach her."

"Ho, you forgets yer little Tubbers, darlin-ger!" said Tubby in a mimic-cockney voice. "Ever since me farver George told me the meaning of *no-blessy o-blyge*

I've always been the perfect little gent. Now's me chance, what?"

"Tubby, don't be an ass!" begged Miss Pamment with a smiling look of admiration on her fair face. "I say, you'll only get snubbed by her if you do."

Tubby had seized a plate of sandwiches in one hand and a plate of cakes in the other, and balancing them in imitation of a waiter, he went with long strides to the lonely woman. With an amused look Mrs. Pamment watched him, until he came back with a grin, and whispered as he sat down.

"I've got me reward. She said 'Ta much, dearie.' I thought, as a matter of fact, of asking her to join our merry little party over here, but me nerve failed when I saw the sparklers so prolific-like, for I didn't want me ma-in-law to be jealous."

He nodded at Mrs. Pamment, who smiled and squeezed his arm fondly. William liked him for his warm humanity, and realized with a sinking heart that others seeing himself so quiet and dull would consider him an unprepossessing person, not knowing that he was striving to serve the new race by his vision. He knew that Mrs. Pamment was looking at him, and, feeling that he ought to have volunteered to take Miss Pamment's horror something to drink, he got up without a word and went over to her. She was taking minute bites at an egg-and-cess sandwich.

"I say, do let me get you something to drink, will you?" he asked her, and her smile revealed some teeth of gold.

"Thank you awfully," she replied; "now, I call that reely kind, I do."

"Champagne?"

"Ta much, dearie."

He got a bottle and a clean glass after waiting some minutes, and went back to her. She made room for him to sit down, somewhat to his consternation, and began to talk like one who has been repressing some anxiety.

"I suppose that nice boy who brought me some food is your brother? No? Well, the Scotch girl is surely your sister, isn't she? I mean to say, I could have sworn you was brother and sister. I had a boy somewhat like you once."

"In the war, I suppose, madam?"

"Yes, killed, the poor little darling, and only eighteen, too; but the lad would go, and neither me nor his father wanted to stand in his way. A flying observer, in the R.F.C., he was."

"Yes," said William, realizing the futility of words.

"Well, cheery-oh, as my poor little dead Herbie used to say. Cheery-oh, Mr. What-do-you-call-it! My best respects!" The restraint of her grief, and the melancholy tone of her voice, somehow made him feel serene.

"Are you alone?" he asked.

"Yes, dearie," she sighed. "Me and Father came down to Findlestone to see our other boy, who's got some swell friends down here. I suppose you don't happen to know anyone of the name of Warbeck—Lieutenant Warbeck of Oozarrs? Or a Mrs. d'Arcy Fairfax?"

"Are you Mrs. Warbeck?" asked William, interested.

"Oh, no, I'm Mrs. White. Only my boy, Peter, is always mentioning those names in his letters, so the lad's father and me thought we'd come down and see him here when he wouldn't come home for Peace Day.

I suppose he's a bit ashamed of his old parents. I mean to say, anyone could see with half an eye that I'm not quite the lady, couldn't they?"

She looked anxiously at him, and he replied truthfully but evasively that he had not thought about it.

"Don't you find I jar you a little?"

"No, of course you don't!"

"Well, my Peter told me my manners jarred on him. That's my mistake for trying to make the lad a gentleman. We sent him to the best school we could get him into—perhaps you know Harrow, do you? And then he went to Sandhurst—it's reely the Royal Military College, but they all calls it Sandhurst. It makes Peter nearly cry when I call it 'College.'"

"I think I met him this afternoon," said William.

Mrs. White was very anxious to hear all about her son, and he told her that when he had left him he was resting, in order to be fresh for the evening, which was the literal truth.

"Dad went to bed tired. I mean to say, he isn't used to drinking very much, and he worked very hard in the war. We had a little place in Brum before the war, making magnetos, but you should see it now, Mr. What-do-you-call-it! But Peter won't go near it."

"I suppose he knows you've come?"

"Oh, yes. We wanted to get into the place where he stays, the Victoria, but he wrote and said it was full up, so father and me come here instead. It's the leading hotel, isn't it? Do I drop any aitches?"

"No. Do I?"

She laughed.

"I'm waiting up in case Peter comes. If you see him, you might tell him I'm here, will you? I mean to

say, I shall be here till I go up to our suite on the first floor. Now, that's reely kind of you. No, I won't have any more wine, thank you, dearie, or I shall be snoozing off, and I want to see the little lad when he comes."

When she had mentioned the name of her son, he had at once become dejected. Eveline and Lionel were sitting at a table with Lord Spreycombe and his elder sister, and another couple—a man dressed as an Arab sheik whom William recognised as a staff-major on the headquarters of the Cavalry Corps in France, and a girl dressed as a Turkish woman. Lady Rachel Cerr-Nore, as Queen Elizabeth, sat upright and stiff, partly on account of Eveline's presence, and partly because her ginger wig was intensely hot, her ruff made her chin sore, and the whalebone corset was oppressive. She had the slanting dark eyes of her brother, but her lips were not so red or thick. She was not enjoying herself, and answered with reserved graciousness the frequent remarks of Eveline, whose brilliant colouring of face and eyes was drawing the attention of all at the surrounding tables. Her own table, with the exception of the unbending Lady Rachel, was kept in continuous laughter by her drolleries and conceits. Sir Rudolph Cardew, the veteran actor-manager, beautifully mellow after a pint of Perrier Jouet and a bottle of '64 port, sauntering in a detachment of reverie through the assembly with his monocle twirling on its black riband, his patriarchal white hair so glossy and his dress clothes so pluperfect, stopped before her as though she were the only woman in the room, and in a hush he bowed to her companions, and fixing the monocle in an eye, his cadent voice was heard to say:

"Ah, Mrs. d'Arcy Fairfax, had I been dead a cycle of

centuries, and you passed by me grave, me bones would rise joyfully, ah, joyfully, at the sound of your voice, and dance in me tomb."

William heard the words, and saw the animation fade from her face, leaving it still and grave and awed. And taking the tips of her fingers, he bowed low over them and touched them with his lips; bowed to Lady Rachel and to Major Fairfax, allowed his monocle to fall; passed his forefinger and thumb down the broad riband; and sauntered towards the further door as though he were in an empty room, twirling his monocle.

Shortly afterwards the drum was banged, and many young men cheered. The strings of balloons were pulled down by servants, and everyone scrambled to obtain one. A dinner-waggon laden with toys was pushed across the floor by the *maitre de reception*, and promptly pushed over by the rowdier youths, and ticklers, scammell pipes, whistles, swallow-burrs, flags of the Allies, fools' caps and bladders, rubber imp faces with tongues that stuck out on squeezing, and a score of other delights were picked up and laughingly inspected. The Jazz band began, and hundreds of coloured paper ropes and chains and tapes were thrown in curl and festoon and whizzing lunules over the multiloquent heads. The revellers wove and interwove in their abandon to natural joy, speaking to anyone and everybody, blowing whistles in the ears of strangers and allowing themselves to be enwound with brittle web and chain. Lady Rachel Cerr-Nore was tickled under the chin by a Yankee doughboy and actually laughed, when with glistening face near her ruff he shouted, "Gee, I guess this is a bully country after all." Above the din could be heard the rattle of the hunting

horn blown by Lord Spreycombe, and his strident yells of "Tear'm, tear'm, tear'm, li'l bitches, l'il bitches, tear'm, tear'm." Pushed hither and thither William experienced a surge of happiness so strong that he felt if only his voice could equal it his shouts would roll round the earth: that the spirit of the moment's fraternity must never be lost, never be allowed to subside, but must gather impetus and be grasped for ever, so that enmity and strife should perish for ever! And with shining eyes he looked around him, his head above most men.

At the end of the dance hotel servants cleared the floor of litter, and while he was standing against a pilaster, William saw strolling into the ballroom a soldier he had not noticed before. He was tall and with a small dark moustache, in a blue patrol jacket with high collar, and his trousers with red piping down the seams were fastened under his Wellington boots. On his shoulder straps he wore the three gilt stars of a captain's rank, and a row of medal ribands on his left breast. The slim and elegant figure had an air of aloofness, and as he came nearer, occasionally glancing at the faces of men and women seated round the walls, William recognized his cousin Phillip. He got up and walked towards him, noticing with pride that the first ribands of the row were the Distinguished Service Order and the Mons Star with silver rosette. His face was still thin, but not so pale or haggard as when he had last seen him; he wore his black hair short and his deep blue eyes had the same speculative look that had been so pronounced in him as a boy.

Phillip stared at William, and said, as he came forward to shake him gladly by the hand:

"Willie, old man, what an immense relief to meet you in this wilderness!"

"But where did you come from? I had no idea——"

"But what are *you* doing here? I thought you were at Rookhurst!"

"I've been living in North Devon."

"I'm wandering about spare at present. I've chucked the service." Phillip offered him a cigarette, with a hand that shook as it held out the case. "I say, Willie, how about a spot to drink? Let's get out of this crowd."

They went to the bar, and over whiskey-and-soda Philip told his cousin that he had been at his home for two days, and that the Peace Celebrations in the London suburb where he lived had so depressed him that he had been "unable to stick it any further."

"I got my motor-bike and came down here—two hours blind over bumpy roads—I've left it in a garage. I used to be in the Rest Camp on the Leas."

"I know," said William, looking at him.

"Who told you?"

"Lina."

Phillip's cheeks went white, his cheekbones flushed, and he took a gulp from his tumbler. William's heart was beating in his throat and ears. They did not look at each other.

"She's here to-night, old man."

"Yes, I thought she might be. I say, have another gasper?"

"No, thanks; I've still got this one."

Three wassailing old men were standing near, and one of them, an old dug-out colonel lately commandant of a Rest Camp, and known to the populace as The Flapper King, kept repeating drunkenly:

"She's ravishing. She's gloriously. Our day's gone. Day f' youth. We'r hashbeens. All pretty women, g'bless'm, after th' boys. Day f' youth. Drink up, g'en'men."

"I say, have you seen her yet?" said William.

"Not yet. I say," he whispered. "That fellow behind me is Colonel Tar, my late Commandant. I don't want him to see me."

Another gulp.

"Let's clear!"

"Right-ho!"

They went away.

"Do you know Major Fairfax, Phillip?"

"Is—is he here, Willie?"

"Yes. An awfully nice chap."

The colour was coming back to Phillip's cheeks.

"Tell me, Willie, how did you meet her?"

"In Devon, Phillip."

He heard him give a kind of gasp, but when he spoke again, about another subject, his voice was normal. It so happened that as they stood in the hall by the lift they encountered her as she was returning alone from the cloakroom. She stopped as she saw Phillip. Her eyes became large and she did not smile. Phillip looked at her steadily.

"Well, Phèa?" she said, as though with an effort to put a faint smile on her lips only, "why do you stare at me like that?"

His voice was low and sad.

"Only because I have not seen you for so long a time, Betty."

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming down? It is rather a—a shock, meeting you so suddenly like this."

"Let's get some refreshments, and we can talk," stammered Phillip, trying to smile.

"Refreshments? My dear Phèa, you're not at a suburban hop. We've had supper."

Phillip winced.

Eveline said decidedly, "I must go back to the ballroom. My husband is waiting. Would you like to meet him?"

His cheekbones burned red. Standing stiffly, he replied with quivering pride:

"No. Do not let *him* wait in vain. I have just come seventy-five miles to see you once more, and I have seen you. Good-bye—hark! It is twelve o'clock! I am just in time to shake you by the hand on the day of days—what did we plan for Victory Night long ago? It doesn't matter. It is over now. Yes, it is over," he murmured, in a voice without reproach or disesteem. Turning to his cousin he shook hands with him, said "Good-bye, old man, and all the best!" in a firm voice, and taking his uniform cap from a peg, walked out of the hotel for ever.

She shivered, and said wistfully to William, "Coming?" but when he made no reply she went on alone. He walked unsteadily into the lounge, a shadowy place of soft carpets, couches, and deep armchairs holding still couples from whom came a low laugh, a whisper, an unheeded protest. It seemed to him that he walked in a nightmarish dream: that he would awake and find himself in his room at home, and that the strange wartime and the stranger peacetime would fade as phantasms of a night's unrest, that it would be time to get up and prepare for school. This feeling passed, giving way to an obscurity of mystical thought, wherein it seemed that life was an incomprehensible illusion, that

natural reality was the calm and untroubled after-sleep known as death. The after-sleeping was real, and life a little wayward sojourn from it, like moisture in clouds that inevitably, predestinately, went back to the ocean.

He sat down in a dark corner. In the distance was audible the thrumming of the band. He had been reclining only a short time when he saw the figure of Eveline enter the door, and hesitate, turning one way then another, searching. The exhausting emotions of the last forty-eight hours, the lack of sleep, the tension of expectancy, these were beginning to produce a reaction; he sat still, imagining that he cared nothing for her. When with a low exclamation she found him and swiftly moved to him he rose to his feet, swaying a little, and offered his chair. She sat down, making place for him beside her. In the dim room, lit by candelabra on the far side, she faced him; but not with the faltering glance of a minute past. Those eyes now were very gentle, the lips near his own; mouth came to mouth, bosom to bosom, and girdling arms; and having sought and found, eyes closed upon reality, drawing over themselves the cloak of rapture, wilder than any known, since in its rush it carried away all fret, all doubt, all wasting pain.

The candles on the far mantelpiece burned on in small flickering gold points, yet radiant to him like the branched buttercups of May meadows. In the mirrors they shook and quivered as though respondent to his own felicity.

"Eve, I can't go on without you," he murmured against her breast, in whose soft warmth heart's bubble was breaking the faster for his touch.

She whispered:

"I've been whirling life around me ever since we parted, in order to forget."

"You *wanted* to forget me? O God, I can't believe it."

She pointed to an eastern window, filled by the moon rising over the black chimney stacks on the Leas houses. He stared at it, thinking it was like the powdered face of a broken-hearted clown. Her fingers caressed his neck, and he returned to enfold her, touching with his lips the hot eyelids. She murmured, half playfully:

"Querulous child, what do you know of the secret shrine in a woman's heart, on the altars of which burn the candles for slain dreams?"

"Why did you leave me so cruelly, Eve?" he murmured.

She made no reply; and he knew she was weeping. He took her closer; the tears wetted his cheek. The slow falling music of the Eton Boating Song came to them, the moon filled dark corners of the room with a pale cold light.

"Why are you weeping?"

"Because everything I do seems to bring pain to someone else, and b-because one part of me is w-wastrel of love, and w-wicked——"

"But you love me, don't you? Kiss me, my darling."

"That is not the faithful visionary speaking."

"I care nothing for visions. Say that you still love me."

She did not speak.

"Eve, you torture me."

"No, my darling. Do you know, I am a little afraid of you. I believe you would break my heart if you could, break it by forcing a w-way into its very core.

You are too strong for me, for you have the white spirit of childhood—a spirit untainted by what is called life. I am like that in a way, such a lesser way, because I am a woman, I suppose. Ah, no, I am stronger than you—poor lost child—whose hands beating at my heart seem to turn it to flame . . . when I think of going home after this, to *his* home . . . and after the wine . . .”

They sat holding hands. The Boating Song ended, and there was a silence following, in contrast to the usual bruit after the jazz. Then shadowy couples strolled into the lounge, rested, and drifted out again when the harsh rhythms started. Others came in, searching for dark places, murmuring: “How about over there?” or: “Is there anyone on that couch?” and, perhaps: “So sorry! Couldn’t see you!”—a laugh, a moving away, and then stillness. As the moon rose higher they could see the tearstains on the powdered clown face. A clock chimed the half-hour. It would soon be one o’clock.

“Billy, who was that woman alone in the corner you were talking to at supper?”

“She said she was Mrs. White.”

“What did she want?”

“She said she was waiting for her son, Peter White, a cadet.”

“Oh, yes, I know him slightly. He is rather a nice little boy. He was supposed to come to tea to-day, but didn’t turn up. He likes playing with Jonquil on the floor. Oh, Billy, Phèa did frighten me.”

“Another one!”

“I swear, he isn’t, Billy. I can’t help it if men get silly over me. I think I shall go and burn my hair and

face in the bonfire, and then no one will care about me."

He kissed her, and whispered:

"Eve, come under the pines down the Leas."

"Yes."

"We can slip out through the conservatory."

"Yes, wait here. I'll get my cloak."

Like thieves they departed. The crowd was thick round the bonfire, which had crashed, and from the heap went up flames lambent in the moonlight. A party of soldiers was hopping to the tune of mouth-organs and a concertina played by A. B. Harnett, caps on the backs of heads, bottles sticking out of jacket pockets. They stopped to watch them.

"Dear fellows," he said, thinking of the men of his old "squadron," "if they could be always so happy! I wonder if their dead pals can see them now? Do you know Owen's Greater Love."

Red lips are not so red,
As the stained stones kissed by the English dead.
Kindness of woo'd and wooer
Seems shame to their love pure
O Love, your eyes lose lure,
When I behold eyes blinded in my stead.

"The grousing, skrimshanking, sentimental tom-mies! The dearest fellows——" he added, with a break in his voice.

She pressed to her heart the hand she held so tightly, and then to her lips. Together they went down the cliff path, and so to the dark pines. The tongue of the wind drew itself over the black tops, stirring to sound every needle. Gently he uncloaked her, spreading the cloak

of white furs on the forest floor where was no moonlight, and drew her down into the darkness, and hid his face in her hair.

Sunken to a glowing mass was the bonfire when they passed it on their way back. The soldiers were gone; stray couples stood gazing at the ruinous pile, and lonely figures were asleep near it, and a homeless cur dog. Through the conservatory they slipped into the lounge, in darkness now the candles were guttered. It would be three o'clock soon, but still the dance revolved unwearied, the banjos strummed tautly, the Negroes shouted their wide-mouthed pleasantries. Major Fairfax told them that "one of her pals named Warbeck had just been slung out, after knocking all the silk hats off their pegs, stamping on them, and fighting five waiters." He himself had been engrossed in a game of poker, and hoped that he hadn't been too selfish, or been away too long. She replied that they had been outside in the moonlight, whereupon he suggested a dance, and they joined the tireless throng. William watched till the stir hid them, saw the last turn of her heels, and went out into the thin ghastly light of the false dawn.

The Leas were deserted, the lamps extinguished, the bonfires a heap of embers from which rose and played lilac and blue flames that swayed one way or another like a cloud of gnats. A great heat was thrown out. He lay down on his side, head pillowed on left arm. Almost at once he must have slept, for later he awoke stiff and cold, crawling immediately towards the warmth, followed by the cur dog that had been curled against his back.

CHAPTER VI

GUEST IN THE HOUSE

THRUSHES were singing when he awoke, chilled and weary, with the mongrel licking his face. The fire was a rough flat circle of white ash around which a few dishevelled figures were lying. Hundreds of bottles, black, green, and transparent, whole and broken, labelled and plain, were scattered with paper, orange-peel, stoppers, Mr. Archibald Dodder's bowler, boots and shoes, a set of false teeth, a woman's torn skirt, walking sticks, flattened hats, fragments of food, and a dead eave-martin winged by the heat. At one edge of the fire stood a discoloured iron seat, evidently uprooted from the promenade and cast on the bonfire during the frolics. Across the embers the Grand Hotel quivered and faded in the hot air arising, seeming insubstantial and remote as the happenings of the night before. He arose and stretched, then went down to the deserted beach, and bathed in the sea. He returned fresh and clear-minded to the Leas, resting gratefully in the beams of the rising sun. On the blue and silver water fishing boats were waiting slacksailed for a breeze. Strolling to the town, he bought a newspaper, glanced at the uninteresting headlines, and dropped it in the gutter. To the lower quarter down a steep cobbled road he went, going into an eating house and ordering some breakfast. A

tousled girl with undarned stockings and dragging slippers brought him some kind of fried fish called aussie, margarine, marmalade and a pint of strong tea which he drank from a thick mug. He discovered that "aussie" was a euphemism for dog-fish, and gave half of it to the curdog, with all the margarine. Afterwards he went to look at the Bogside shop, finding that the paint had not been removed, and that several miserable flies were stuck to it. While he gazed the cur dog was sick, and deserted him.

He asked a milkman the way to the house of Major Fairfax, and was directed to a square of ugly Georgian houses with stucco fronts and bellpulls, small front gardens filled with laurel and privet bushes, and railed off from flagged pavements by rusty rails and stone gate pillars. A number of cats were sitting in the roadway and on the pavements before the houses, while male and female servants were sweeping and shaking rugs and mats. The square of houses looked on to a railed garden bordered by trees and shrubs on the lawn of which thrushes and blackbirds were hopping with sparrows and eagerly running starlings. He saw a big cat crouching under a shrub, its yellow eyes fixed on a wren stitting above it. He recognized the monster as belonging to Major Fairfax's grandfather, and threw a piece of earth at it.

"I'm glad you've 'ittim," spoke someone behind, "great fat ugly birdketching fleabitten creature." He looked over the bushes and the railings, and saw a female servant standing there, leaning on a broom.

"Do you mean Tommy?" asked William.

"Yes, that's Tommy Three, the great fat ugly creature. All through the war he had to have his meat though we was starving. I wish some dog would ketch

him and wring his neck, but lorblessme, sir, Tommy Three can fight any dog. And the old gent would die on a spot if his cat was in peril. 'Tisn't right, I think, to keep cats in luxury while working people starves. And him that was a parson, too!"

"Mr. Fairfax was a parson?"

"Yes, and more godly in his young days than now, with all his talk of British Israel. Nice thing, I don't think, to say that the English are really shonks and ebrews, the lorst tribe of Israel. Well, talking won't shake no mats, even if it does put us above the monkeys, as some do say, which I doubt, as talk means scandal, leastways in this house. If you see Tommy Three, just you chuck more dirt at him, the great fat ugly birdketcher."

"I will. Now can you tell me where Major Fairfax lives?"

"Yes, up there." She pointed to a road crossing one of the exits of the square.

"Thanks very much."

"It's the corner house. Look, if you come in the road here you can see it. It wouldn't take a hen half a minute to step there. The top flat. Good-morning, sir."

"Good-morning."

She waved her broom, bobbed inside, and William went through a gate into the roadway. He saw the house and turned the corner to find a flight of worn stone steps leading up to the front door. The bow windows on either side of the door held paper notices that the desirable flat was to be let. He ran up the steps and rang the bell. He waited some minutes, then opened the door and walked upstairs, past the third floor flat, and to a white door, with stained glass middle, on which was tacked a faded card:

BRIGADIER-GENERAL AND MRS. L. M. F. D'ARCY FAIRFAX

And pasted below it a piece of paper inscribed in Eveline's hand:

RING, AND WALK IN.

He pressed the bell, turned the glass handle, and stepped across a black Persian carpet laid on the hall floor.

There seemed to be no one about. An open door showed what was apparently the drawing-room, and he went inside, going at once to the fireplace because several photographs of Eveline were silver-framed on the shelf above it. In silence he stared at them.

One was obviously an enlargement from a snapshot. She was standing before a tree, her face upheld, with loosened hair; the same look of intense soulfulness upon it that he remembered in the moonlight when first they had kissed. Another, a portrait study of head and shoulders, seemed to contain in the laughing lips and eyes the shining spirit of earth-joy. A third showed her, serious and calm, in riding habit and mounted on a tall hunter, hounds grouped below. A fourth was taken in natural colours with her husband in the uniform of a brigadier-general; how proud she looked, standing beside the soldier with red and black brassard of corps headquarters-staff, double breastrow of ribbons, and four wound stripes. The grave small head of Jonquil, in an oval silver frame, was next it; and Jonquil as a fat naked baby on her smiling mother's knee. This photograph was soiled, and worn at the edge, as though by long carrying in tunic pocket—probably one carried in the war, he imagined.

On a wall hung an oil painting of Eveline as a small

child in a briar-torn frock. It was signed by the artist, Norman, and bore below the signature the red asterisk of purchase when it was on the line at the Royal Academy, and the catalogue number. An original artist would have hesitated before declaring that Norman possessed an original vision; indeed, many critics of his work had ceased, in the year nineteen nineteen, to reiterate their views of his art's rottenness, of its obvious derivation from painters of such widely divergent style as Titian, Goya and Romney, without the insight of those masters or the technique they had evolved to present their vision. To the man staring at it, the picture gave a vague feeling of distress. The blue-gray eyes were gently sweet in aspect, wide and unstartled: the face oval, the nose little and childlike; the sanguine lips untogether enough to show a gleam of small teeth, and just drooping as though in shy pensiveness of life. Auburn hair parted and brushed away from the brow, falling in two flumes to the ears, whence in ropes it slid over the shoulders, through little clutching hands, and so to the lap, spraying out from the confining plaits like firebirds' tails.

He stood before the portrait, the distress becoming pain as in his mind the flat surface was breathed upon, and made to rise into life, and to grow, till the maiden became wife-old, snatched while immature by an experienced and mature man. From the painting he returned to contemplate the face of the husband, trying to probe behind the level gaze and to estimate the mind and feelings of him; but much conjecture resulted in nothing.

The room contained many curios of Eastern travel and of the Great War. A pair of German saw-bayonets, of the type used by regimental pioneers, was

nailed above the mantel, an Iron Cross looped to the standard of one by its black-and-silver ribbon. Polished field gun cartridge cases were used as vases for flowers on the table; a nosecap for a paperweight; there were pickle-haubes, Bavarian shakos, the beaver of a Deathshead huzzar, a Zeiss aircraft rangefinder. The room was furnished in Jacobean oak, with two lionskins on the floor, agape in stuffy death. An old writing desk filled one corner, open, with paper, pens and blotter scattered about untidily; on top of it a bunch of roses rested coolly in a silver bowl; used coffee cups stood about the room in disarranged chairs, and ash was on the floor.

“Good-morning, mister,” said a hoarse voice. An old woman stood at the door, looking with dreary solemnity at him. Her face was an irregular knobby red, and she wore spectacles with thick lenses that made a look at her uncomfortable.

“Good-morning.”

“Good-morning, mister.”

“I suppose you wonder who I am.”

“I never wonder at nobody nor nothing, mister, especially if it happens in this household.”

He pondered this remark, spoken so solemnly, but decided that it had no hidden significance.

“Please don’t be alarmed: I’m not a burglar. I’m a friend of Mrs. Fairfax.”

“I ain’t never alarmed, mister. When I seed you standing there, I imagined you were a friend of the family, and if you will excuse an old woman, mister, anyone could see with the wing of an eye that you are a gentleman, in spite of them rough clothes.”

“I suppose no one’s up yet?”

“Only me, mister, and my little ducky prancing

about upstairs, pretending she's a corksparrow, hatching a nest o' eggs in the basin, hir-hir-he!"

She ended in wheezy laughter, stretching a big mouth.

"I suppose you're Martha, aren't you?"

"Yes, mister. Who told you?"

"Quillie."

"Why, bless us, mister, then you must be Willum. I beg pardon, but that's the name I know you by."

"Yes, I'm William. I hope there wasn't trouble over Quillie's running away with me."

"No trouble, mister, only a few more grey hairs for me, but I don't matter."

At that moment the voice of Jonquil called outside:

"Martha, one of the eggs is aggled. But Quillie's hatched three—such lovely little swallow-babies. May Quillie come down, Martha?"

Martha moved outside, and hoarse whisperings came to William. A gurgle of delight, with bare feet pattering, and Jonquil in a cream-coloured sleeping suit had leapt up to him, wrapping arms round his neck and legs round his waist.

"W-W-Willum, Willum, Quillie's so happy you've come. Quillie's scrumptiously happy. Martha, Martha, just you listen to Willum telling about Swallow Brow and the fairies."

"Hir-hir-he," chuckled Martha, "you are a caution, lovey. My, you'll be one for the gentlemen when you're older. Hir-hir-he! Ain't she a dear little love, mister? Have you seen her mother when she was a little 'un?"

She pointed to the portrait in oils, and he nodded.

"Your dog's here, mister."

"Yes, yes, Willum, your dog's here. Where is her,

Martha? Fetch Willum's dog to Quillie, at once, Martha. W-W-Willum!"

"What?"

"Your dog barked suthing awful last night. Didn't he, Martha?"

"Yes, lovey, he did. We tied him up in the boxroom, but he shouted the roof off, almost, and so I had him with me in the kitchen, and he whined there. And when I went to bed, well, he 'ollered fit to fetch out the lifeboat."

"Where is he now?"

"Gone, mister."

She looked very much like a sad frog, with the deep upper lip, the wide mouth, and her convex glasses. Jonquil dismounted from William as impetuously as she had leapt up, and Martha urged her to go upstairs and get into bed again, until she came up to dress her.

"Quillie wants Willum to dress her."

"But that ain't proper, lovey."

"Why not?"

"Hir-hir-he," gurgled Martha, screwing up her eyes, "'t isn't right for a gentleman to dress a lady."

"But Willum isn't a gentleman. Course not. Why, look, you dam old fool Martha, his shoes aren't polished and his hair's all rough. You're not a gentleman, are you, W-W-Willum?"

"No, Quillie."

"Course not. So you can dress me, can't you?"

"I'll do my best. But I haven't had a lot of practice."

"Doesn't matter. Come on upstairs, Willum, and I'll show you my nest of swallows."

"Do you think it will matter, Martha?"

"No, certainly not, mister. Why, she's only a baby. Criky, there's the master!"

The sound of a door being opened and closed in the hall, of a foot thud on the carpet, had made Martha say this.

“Morning, Maddison. I wondered whose voice it was. Why, Quillie, you look very fresh, m'dear. Been swimming, Maddison?”

“Some hours ago, Major. Afraid I must look rather untidy, as I haven't been to bed yet, and my bag is down at the Queen's Hotel, where I left it.”

“My dear fellow, don't worry about that. I can lend you a razor, and you can have a hot bath if you want it.”

He was in a dressing-gown and slippers, and obviously on the way to the bathroom himself, so William thanked him, and declined.

“M'dear chap, don't stand on any sort of ceremony with us. We're very simple folk here, y' know. You go and bathe, and I'll write some letters. They've got to be written, and it's immaterial whether before or after my bath. Lina's still sleeping—she's fagged out with the excitement, poor girl. Martha, get Captain Maddison a towel, will you? And some tea—I expect you've a thirst after last night, what?”

“But, father, Willum mustn't have a bath now, because Quillie wants him to dress her. Don't you, Willum.”

He felt that he had betrayed Jonquil in the stormy time that followed. Told with firm gentleness that she must go upstairs, Jonquil rushed behind him and refused to go. Her father told her not to be a foolish child, and ordered her to proceed, while Martha stood by and muttered to herself. Major Fairfax caught hold of her arm, leading her to Martha, and saying that she must be taken up immediately. Jonquil protested and

kicked him with her bare toes, hurting herself, so that she cried, and fought him the more. The father held her quite still, at arms' length, and said in a severe voice:

"Jonquil, you're making a fool of yourself. I tell you that you must go upstairs with Martha, and immediately! Are you going to do it?"

"No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. Quillie wants Willum. Quillie hates you. Let go of Quillie's arms. You hurt Quillie. Let go, you damn swine!"

Whereupon she was spanked, and screamed the more. Martha seized her, and bore her struggling upstairs. Major Fairfax said:

"Childish temper! Mustn't give way to a child or a horse, Maddison, if you care for them. Here you are. You go in and get on with it, and I'll sling you in a towel. You'll find everything in there. Don't hurry!"

He opened the door, and William entered at once, realizing that his host wished him out of the way. Hardly had he taken off his coat when he heard the voice of Eveline asking why Jonquil was crying: the indistinct reply of her husband: and the sound of her leaping upstairs, doubtless to comfort the petulant little girl, whose naughtiness had been caused by the calamity, to her, of an intense delight suddenly becoming an acute pang.

A long howl, and a scratching at the door, told him that Billjohn was on his scent. He opened the door, and the spaniel sidled in, talking to his master in faint whines and gurgles, not going near him, but gazing with lollèd tongue.

"You don't seem awfully happy, Billjohn," said William.

uncomfortable, thinking that the other would interpret his remark to be a hint. But whatever he thought nothing was said further, and after a long search in the lower town after breakfast he found a drab house at the corner of a drab street where he engaged a room for seventeen shillings a week, including breakfast.

For the first two days he had tea in the flat, and on the third day he had lunch, tea and dinner. Thereafter he was expected to every meal, Major Fairfax told him.

"My dear Bill, Lina and I are only too pleased to have you. And bring your Mary in whenever you want to," with a kindly, knowing smile. Later, when Eveline and William were alone, he asked her why Lionel had spoken about Mary Ogilvie.

"Billy, dear, you are most dense. Naturally I had to make up something—to tell a damned lie, in other words—to account for your presence here in Findlestone. A woman has to act all her life, and if she doesn't, she is usually downtrodden."

"But who would tread you down?"

"The hungry generations. Men like Julian Warbeck. My dear, I was terrified when he called this morning. He had a black eye! He never gets drunk like other men, or rather he never behaves like other men when he is drunk. His face gets flushed, and he talks with sonorous bombast. And the pity of it is that he is really a very nice boy, and a jolly clever one, too, but absolutely wasting himself. But I suppose you wonder at our being, or rather having been, friends. My dear, Julian used to be with a reserve regiment of cavalry stationed near here—at Quorncliffe—and they gave a dinner and dance one night. We became friends, with the inevitable result. Woe's me, and woe's me!"

They were sitting by the Leas bandstand while the

afternoon holiday crowd sauntered by, and hangdog men pulled at bathchairs containing wrapped invalids.

"You see, Billy. I can't help men being attracted by me. Julian came along at all hours of the day to see me, and I couldn't very well close the door in his face—and he wouldn't take any hints. I didn't mind him, and Aunt Margy—the one that is so fond of Billjohn—was amused by him, and before Lionel came home I used to spend most of my time at their house. Neither Aunt Margy nor Aunt Milly minded that, as the men used to come there."

"Yes, I suppose they would."

Conversation was made awkward by the Town band rendering, with a solo by a precise cornet-player, the most popular air from *The Gondoliers*. The concircling chairloungers clapped the performance so enthusiastically that an encore was given. Afterwards he returned to the subject, which Eveline seemed most willing to discuss.

"Julian began to send me poems, which I thought awfully long, but good, and told him so. Later, I discovered that they were by Swinburne—'Faustine'—and bits from 'The Triumph of Time.' Then came a shower of sonnets and a translation of Catullus which he insisted on reading to poor little me. People began to talk, and as he made himself notorious by drinking, I had to write and ask him to keep away, with the result that you see now. It's very hard for a woman like myself to live, you know, Billy. There are so many pitfalls. God alone knows what the populace thinks of me, and certainly I don't care. But I care for the respect of my friends."

"Eve."

"Yes, my darling?"

"Do you think Lionel knows that I—that we love each other?"

"No, my dear. What makes you ask?"

"He looks at me sometimes with a funny look. I can't quite make him out. I felt terrified when first I met them on the Leas, because they were your people."

"I shouldn't worry. I understand Lionel perfectly. My dear, of course he does not suspect anything."

"You know, Eve, I feel a vile person, enjoying his hospitality, and pretending to be his friend, when in Devon we——"

"But aren't you his friend? You told me this morning that you liked him very much."

"I do like him."

"Then why are you making all this pother?"

"But don't you understand?"

"I think you think too much."

"I see."

"Now, Billy, don't be silly. Do you think I'm a fool, who can't understand what you mean? Do you think I am quite easy in my mind, all the time? But what can we do? I cannot bear the idea of hurting anyone, and there is only one way to avoid doing that."

"What is that?"

"By not hurting them."

"Yes, I suppose you are right. But, Eve, I am never happy, because——"

"Of course I'm right! Billy, sit forward, there's a youth over there I don't want to see. Don't turn round." And when he had gone Eveline said, "You remember my telling you about Peter White? He is another that strains the web of friendship. A dear boy, but weak and foolish."

"How about William Maddison? Also weak and foolish?"

"He is my heart's own." Spoken in a tone that thickened the blood already sunwarmed, and the thoughts disturbing him were gone.

"Eve, I wish we were back in Sealion Cove, or on the Corpsnout."

"So do I."

"I would be there for ever with you. That is real life, in the wind and the sun. The music they are playing now is only the pale ghost of primitive happiness, that has long ceased to be in our civilized state, but lain dormant in the inherited part of the mind, to emerge one day as music. These people dream when they hear music: they would be bored to hear the source of it, which is the wind in those dry thistles and elderberries and gorse of the Corpsnout, on the hills loved of the ancient men, over which burned the stars by night, and the sun by day."

His voice was rapturous, she stared in delight at his eyes.

"You make me long to rush away to Devon again. But that is impossible—yet awhile."

"Let's go on the downs this evening."

"My dear, haven't we promised to have a musical evening with the Aunts? Beastly nuisance. We'll go to-morrow. Come and bathe now, and then we must go home to tea."

After dinner all three went to the house of the grandfather in Radnor Park Gardens. The old short maid recognizing William gave him a bright smile, but the sight of Billjohn took this off her face.

"There'll be ructions," she prophesied.

Mrs. Beayne, the elder of Mr. Fairfax's two daugh-

ters, met them in the hall. Her deep voice, rough yet musical, greeted them as she came forward.

“It’s so nice to see you all. And you, too, my poor bow-wow”—the voice was now comically nasal—“runin’ away from master. Naughty baow-waow! P’rhaps it was a lady baow-waow.” Billjohn, with wagging tail, was standing with his forefeet in her lap, and licking her hand. “And how’s Billjohn’s master? Recovered from the shock of meeting Eve’s relatives on the Leas?”

“He’s quite recovered, Aunt Margy. Why, only this morning he was saying how nervous he was when he saw you, and how he wanted to grow his beard again!”

“My poo-oor boy, how bad you must feel!”

Inside the drawing room lit by a ragged gasmantle old Mr. Fairfax was sitting in an armchair, a skullcap on his head. Opposite to him across the fireplace was another armchair, and sprawling on a red bandanna handkerchief was the cat Tommy. As they entered the room the domesticate stretched itself luxuriously, opening wide its maw, and turned on its back. But made aware of the spaniel’s presence it sat up, glowered, arched its back, and uttered a growling menace. Billjohn, tail-wagging, went up to it, was spat upon several times, his ears were clawed, and he hid under the table.

“Who let that dog in? Drive it out into the street. Don’t let it touch the cat. Here, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy, don’t be worried. There now, Tommy is quite upset. I know he’ll get indigestion. Milly, go and get some milk and soda-mint. Who’s this young man?” he enquired, turning to look at William.

"My poo-oor parent," said Mrs. Beayne, with deep compassion, "my poo-oor parent."

"How do you do?" beamed Miss Millicent Fairfax to William. "I am so glad you could come. And do you sing? You must sing. I am so sorry about your dog." Her voice lowered. "Don't take any notice of father. He is so old, Captain Maddison. We must be tolerant of grown-ups."

He wondered what age she was herself. Miss Fairfax was considerably smaller than her married sister, and she might have been any age between twenty-five and forty, because of a girlish manner entirely unassumed, and a girlish gown of peacock blue velvet trimmed with white rabbit fur. Frequently she clapped her hands with girlish glee, made whooping noises of hilarity, and leaned back to laugh unrestrainedly. Describing her to William, Eveline had said, "Her hair is of a shade between the colours of mahogany and chestnut, her lips are red as red ink, and her wrinkles are filled with powder, and therefore, approximately level with its general surface." The face of her sister, Margery Beayne, lacked any aid; the big eyes held a look of sadness which gave her with the abundant white hair and smooth cheeks a majestic dignity.

"Lionel, tell me at once who this young man is?" ordered the old gentleman.

"Bill Maddison, grandfather."

"What's he doing in Findlestone?"

"He's staying with us at present. How's your gout, sir?"

"Worse. Is he paying anything?"

"I'm sorry to hear that. But the weather ought to do it good."

"But it doesn't. Come on, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy, up, up, dear old Tommy, Tommy, Tommy, up on poppa's knee!" he coaxed, but the cat, eyeing him to see if he had anything to give, and finding nothing, ignored the invitation.

"Now, Bill Maddison," began Mrs. Beayne, sitting near him, and smoking a meerchaum pipe, which she said was "colouring beautifully." "Now, my boy, I want to hear about your wonderful family of animals. The beautiful Eve, on her return from the Garden, naughty gel, told us a little about them, and a lot about you. Werry embarrassing for a hermit, wasn't it? Oh, werry, werry embarrassing, wasn't it, Billjohn, my handsome baow-waow? Milly, this naughty baow-waow has been using henna on his head. Oh, Billjohn, you sly little man. Trying to cut out the town doggies? Don't be too loving, my dear, don't be too loving, or you'll come to a bad end, like me, won't he, Eveline Fairfax?"

"Don't mind Aunt Margy, Billy," was the laughing reply. "She can't be serious for a moment. But talk to her about foxhounds, beagles, bassets, and anything that barks and wags a tail, and she will be your pal for life."

Mrs. Beayne looked pleased, and continued, "Now, don't put him off me like that, Eveline. Now, Bill Maddison, who is looking after your animals in the cottage, and why did you leave them?"

"Well, they're all gone, Mrs. Beayne."

"How werry sad!"

"I knew I shouldn't keep them long when I took them young."

"And won't you miss them?"

"Yes."

“And why have you come to this hotbed of gaiety?”

He imagined that Major Fairfax was regarding him intently, and was alarmed by the questions to which he endeavoured to give some sort of flippant answers. He felt a relief when the old gentleman was taken to bed on the arm of his daughter Milly, helped upstairs by Major Fairfax, and accompanied by the cat.

Miss Fairfax played the piano on her return, and sang two songs, while Aunt Margy sat in her father's chair and sewed together the component parts of a camisole cut from a pattern in *The Lady*. Then Eveline sang in her dulcet voice Tosti's *Who?* William was ravished by its beauty, and glanced at the husband's face during the song, wondering what he was thinking as he gazed at the singer.

“That's a werry nice song” said Aunt Margy, looking up at its conclusion, and over the rims of her tortoiseshell spectacles, “a very touching song. Isn't it, Billjohn, my handsome baow-waow? No. Billjohn, you mustn't lick Auntie's face. Don't be too loving, me darlint, or you won't be happy.”

A dogtail was thumped on the carpet; the quiet sewing resumed. When William was commanded to sing something, he at once refused; but they were insistent. A long search through a heap of old music scores revealed only one song that he knew, so he sang *On Richmond Hill there lives a lass*, gaining confidence towards the end.

“Werry charming, werry charming,” said Mrs. Beayne, “wasn't it, Billyjohn? Now who was Master thinking of when he was singing?”

After selections from the *Moonlight Sonata* and *The Yeoman of the Guard*, Aunt Milly, clapping her hands, suggested a card game called *Rummy*.

"Those dear Tommies used to like it so," she said musingly. "Lina, have you heard from Pat lately? He was such a nice boy, wasn't he? It is so nice in these rough times to find a young man of good family who has nice manners."

"It's hard to find a man anywhere," chuckled Mrs. Beayne, "even burglars no longer hide under beds."

"Margy, you are disgraceful," reproved her sister. "Now don't light that disgusting pipe again!"

"The world has made me what I am," sighed Mrs. Beayne. "I was driven to smoking a pipe by my life in the tropics with Arthur."

"She's terribly cynical," said Aunt Milly. "She calls Mayfair and Cheltenham the tropics! Don't heed her, Captain Maddison."

"Cynical comes from a Greek word meaning 'dog,'" ventured William, and Eveline said "'Ear, 'ear; Artist Bill on the classics is hot stuff. Sugar in your coffee, Artist Bill?"

Miss Fairfax returned, after coffee, to the subject of young men, and in particular of the nice young flying officer who used to come and visit them.

"Lionel, you should have heard Pat Collyer recite 'The Green Eye of the Little Yellow God.' It was wonderful, wasn't it, Lina? He was such a nice boy, and so brave. Lina, has he written to you lately?"

"I had a postcard the other day, from Brighton or some such place. He's a very negligent correspondent. Simply said 'cheerio' on it. Oh, I'm sick of Rummy. Let's play poker."

Poker palled, as everyone betted extravagantly, with matches. The ragged mantle swung to the snore of the gas. He longed to be away from house-life, and after the game went to sit by the open window.

Across the quiet square came the tinkle of a piano, and a street lamp was blinking through the trees. He leaned out on the window sill, among flower-pots, to be joined by Miss Fairfax, who began a conversation in a low voice.

“Don’t you love the night, Captain Maddison? I do. Look at that lamp over there. And the rustling trees. I love lamplight. If only I were a poet, what things I would write. Do you know Ernest Dowson’s ‘Cynara?’ I used to recite that when I was in the Glad Eye Concert Party for Entertaining Soldiers. I always think of poor Dowson when I see a street lamp, why, I don’t know, but I always do. You know it of course:

“When the feast is finished, and the lamps expire
Then falls thy shadow, Cynara! The night is thine;
And I am desolate and sick of an old passion,
Yea, hungry for the lips of my desire.”

“I always feel when I think of that poem of a poor young boy who is going to the dogs. It is so very sad. I won’t mention any names, in case you know him, but he is in love with someone out of reach, because she is married already. Perhaps you can guess who I mean, but it wouldn’t be fair to give names away. She is very beautiful, and inclined to be foolish, but a very good gel, and very straight. She confides in me, you see; so I know all her little troubles. We are like two gels together—two sisters. Well, the poor boy—he isn’t twenty yet—he is such a sweet boy, too—oh, awfully sweet and so unspoilt—yes, dear Peter, I wish I could be of more help to him—he thinks I don’t know, too, you know—well, the boy is in bad hands. He

associates with low companions. He sometimes drinks too much, and he is such a child, and not used to intoxicating liquor. This beastly war is to blame—oh, if they would hang that wicked old Kaiser, the cause of it all! It's very sad, isn't it, Captain Maddison, to see a young man going to waste, and the spectator unable to help him at all?"

"Yes, it must be disturbing, Miss Fairfax."

"It is. You know, so many men lose their heads over Lina. It worries her, poor gel. Don't you think that Mary Ogilvie is perfectly lovely, with her small head and raven-black hair, and large brown eyes?"

"I knew her as a tiny child, Miss Fairfax. She was always a sweet little soul."

"I know. Lina told me all about it. She is such a kind gel, and although she is usually quiet, she has a very sharp wit! Ah, how I wish I were her age once more! Hark at someone playing the Missouri Waltz. It haunts me, it brings back memories of the long, long, long ago. Doesn't it to you?"

"Yes."

"Oh, what a beautiful night! Look at that tiny little twinkling star up there in the sky. It's like the eye of a baby—Jonquil's eyes twinkled like that when she was in long clothes. Such a darling baby—oh, I did like nursing her. Lina is such a fortunate gel—but I do wish——"

The sentence was not finished owing to a crash in the area below.

"Oh, dear, there goes one of father's geranium-pots. How very unfortunate!"

"I am a careless chap," he apologized. "I was trying to see if I could find Spica the Virgin."

"My poor unknowing boy," said Mrs. Beayne, re-

moving her tortoiseshell spectacles, and giving him a look of mournful compassion, "my poo-oor unknowing boy, you will search in vain for anyone of that description in Findlestone."

"Really, Marjorie, your cynicism is positively banal! You make me blush for you!"

"Present company excepted, my poo-oor sister. I was giving our young and unsophisticated friend a piece of werry, werry good fact. And don't blush for me, dearie. Save them up for your Ideal."

William said, smilingly, "Spica is a star, Mrs. Beayne."

"And so it should be to one of your years, my child. I realized that you were a poetical stargazer. My poor sister, I fear, is werry, werry ignorant, and her mind is not so white as her cheek. Well, dear people, I'm going to bed now."

Shortly afterwards the guests left, and Milly whispered at the door that she had so enjoyed her little talk.

"You must come again," she breathed in his ear. "I will get Mary to come, too. Don't worry over Margy's words. Life has been rough with my beautiful sister, and she has lost all her ideals. What a lovely night! Oh, the bright stars! Au revoir, dear people, I have so enjoyed your coming."

She blew many kisses to them on her hands, and twirling round, disappeared into the gloomy house.

When on the following morning he went to the flat, he met Major Fairfax coming down the steps.

"Can't stop, Bill. Got to catch the London train. After a job. Go up and see Lina. Back to-morrow."

He hastened down the road, a brown bag in his hand. A window above was flung open, and Eveline looked

out, whistling. Her husband turned round, and she continued to wave until the lime trees hid him. Then looking down, she invited him to come up.

Jonquil was playing on the floor of the drawing room with a few pails, a mop, some brooms, and a basin. Eveline was writing at the desk, her back turned.

“W-Willum—look, here’s heaven. I’ve got swallow angels on these trees, and that’s a big pond. Can you hear something?”

A peculiar noise was coming from the kitchen, as Martha sung to herself as she washed up cups and plates at the sink.

“Yes. It’s Martha in the kitchen.”

“Silly! That’s not Martha. That’s Satan in hell growling as he burns up the souls of drunkids an’ boozers.”

He laughed and kissed her, and lay down on the floor beside her, stroking her hair.

“Good morning, Billy. It is so nice that you like my daughter. Youth clings to youth, what? I wondered if you were going to notice me.”

“I saw your back. Shall I come across Heaven to you?”

“I am still on the earth. Quillie darling.”

“Yes, mummie.”

“Go and build up a little hell for yourself in the kitchen, with Martha, will you?”

“But Quillie wants to stay here with W-Willum.”

“But mummie wants to talk with W-Willum alone.”

“You go to hell instead.”

“Quillie!”

“Oh, all right.”

She gathered up the basin and one of the brooms,

and dragged them through the doorway without a word. When they were alone he stood behind her chair and put his hand on her wrist.

"Stop writing. I want to speak to you."

"Just a minute. I must finish this note."

"To whom are you writing?"

"To a friend of mine."

"Oh!"

"Don't be huffy."

"I'm not. I should not have asked."

"I'm writing to Pat Collyer."

"The well-bred young gentleman who recites so beautifully."

"I say, aren't those relatives of Lionel's a scream? My dear, Aunt Margy alarms me. She hasn't the slightest use for convention herself, and lets everyone know it, too. You remember her remark about the stocking? Well, just for a rag, I wore a harlequin bathing dress on Peace Day. I gave a stocking to Naps for bravado when he asked for it, and he tied it round the neck of Tubby Lorayne's bulldog. Aunt Margy saw it afterwards, and gave me such a look. One had to be very careful with Aunt Margy—she knows things by intuition. When she looks at me sometimes I do, indeed, feel a lady of uneasy virtue! Often when I see her I think—'There goes Eveline Fairfax forty years on.'"

"Oh, no, Eve."

"Oh, yes, Billy. You will be whitehaired, too, very tall, and distinguished—probably a famous playwright; but I hope you will not vapourise yourself too much—and I shall make short witty remarks from the gallery to you in the stage box. Won't I, Billjohn? Damn, there's the bell. I wonder who that is?"

Martha knocked at the door. "If you please, miss, Mr. Warbeck wants to see you."

"Ask him in, Marty."

"May I come in?" enquired a suave voice. "Good morning, Eveline. A note in the remembered caligraphy appended on the postern invited me to walk in."

"Hullo, Jay Doubleu. Do you know Captain Maddison?"

Julian Warbeck frowned at William, inspected him and stretched out a hand as far as possible.

"Yes, oh, yes, we know each other. Eveline, may I smoke?"

"Gippies and Virgins on that table. Help yourself."

"Thank you," intoned Warbeck, "a Virgin, I think."

He was dressed in a bright brown suit, very tightly fitting, bright brown boots, with a high collar, a yellow bow tie, and stiff white shirt-cuffs. His reddish hair was oiled and brushed back from the high rounded forehead. Between the thick lips, in one corner of the mouth, he inserted a cigarette, struck a vesta on his heel, lit it, and spun the lighted match through the open window.

"May I sit down?"

"Do."

"Thank you."

"You won't mind my finishing my letter, will you?"

"Can you write while I smoke?"

"Don't be an ass, Jay Doubleu."

"Thank you."

The droll visitor lay back on the soft, and looked quickly at William, and away again. Eveline went on writing with a quill pen, which scratched audibly.

Warbeck cleared his throat, sat up, and addressed the other man.

“Well, how do you like Findlestone, Captain Maddison? Or have you not considered whether you like it?”

“I find it rather an amusing place, Warbeck.”

“Oh, yes, it is an amusing place. Didn't I first meet you on Peace Day? I'm very vague about it all.”

“Yes.”

“Did I borrow a pound from you?”

“I believe you did.”

“Here it is. I am most grateful. Thank you.”

“Thanks very much.”

He passed over a Treasury note.

“Er—Mrs. Fairfax will probably shriek with derision when I ask the question, but have you read Swinburne?”

Eveline laughed, and Warbeck wrinkled his forehead. His droll suavity was gone.

“No, I haven't, Warbeck.”

“Oh!”

He began to gnaw his nails.

“I've read some of Bernard Shaw,” said William.

“I prefer that lesser writer, Shakespeare,” replied Warbeck, satirically.

“And one book by Wells—Tono Bungay.”

“Yes, it's a good book. Yes. Wells has a great and earnest mind. A trifle vulgar, perhaps, in his uninspired moments—but I hear his wife manages to tear up most of the backslanging letters he writes to critics in the Press. One day we shall meet and be friends.”

Eveline laughed mockingly again.

“As for his fraternal friend Bennett, whose *Pretty*

Lady Mrs. Fairfax so adores, well, I should like to meet him, too—and borrow one of his motor-cars. I have a fur coat already.”

“Don’t swank,” called out Eveline.

“Oh, well,” sighed Warbeck, and returned to nails.

She appeared to be writing a long letter. Tired of awaiting her pleasure, William got up and went into the kitchen. Jonquil was throwing about the room pots and pails, which Martha grumblingly picked up.

“Why, what are you doing, Quillie?” he asked.

“She’s a terror, mister. Said that the place was hell, so she’s smashing of it up.”

Martha broke into wheezy laughter. “Dearie me, mister, that kid is the funniest thing I ever did see. And if it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t stop here, only I promised the master when he first went away that I would. I could earn more money outside, if I’d a mind to. But I don’t like leaving the baby, mister.”

“Don’t you get on very well with Mrs. Fairfax, then?”

“’Tisn’t that, mister. Her and me gets on all right, mostly. But I long for the old life.”

“What, acting?”

“You are a comic, mister,” she wheezed. “Acting! Hir-hir-he! No, I used to be in a laundry. Many a gentleman’s shirt I’ve ironed. And washed, too. Not a few spotted with wine, either! Too true, they were! Like that there Warbeck. He’s a funny fellow, mister.”

“I know he is. I’ve seen him before.”

“Used to come in here a lot. Very witty fellow, and has always been a perfect gentleman to me, though I am only an ugly old servant. But when he’s in booze, mister, he’s terrible. Dearie me, you ought to hear Miss Milly talking about him. She hates him. ‘A

nasty fat German pig,' she called him once, and ordered him out of the house—not her house, but this house, what belongs to my lady.”

“Do you know someone called Mr. White, Martha?”

“Yes, mister, and he’s one I feel very sorry for. He’s only been in here once since she came back from Devon, and he came to me with tears in his eyes and said good-bye. But she never did like him very much. Too soppy, she said. But he was always a perfect gentleman to me.”

“Is that Peter White you’re talking about, Martha?” asked Quillie, who during the conversation had been quietly occupied in building a heaven with swallows, out of the ruins of hell.

“You get on with your own business, lovey, and don’t poke your nose into what doesn’t nohow concern you.”

“Don’t be so rude and silly, Martha. I know it was Peter White you meant. Quillie likes Peter White—he used to play with her.”

“Ain’t she cute, mister? Calling ’erself Quillie. Come here, lovey, and let old Marty kiss you. She’s Marty’s baby, mister. Ain’t you, lovey?”

“Er-hum. And Willum’s, too.”

As Willum went across the carpet to the drawing room, he heard Warbeck say in tones of submission, “It will be everything to me, and so little for you to give, old dear. Won’t you?”

Warbeck glared at him as he entered, sighed loudly, and turned away.

“I’ll let you know, but I can’t promise, Jay Doubleu.”

“Thank you. Will you write to me?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you. Well, I’ll go now. Have you finished my volume of ‘Atalanta in Calydon?’ Shall I take it now, or leave it?” He pointed to a book lying on a table.

“I’ve read it, thanks.”

“What do you think of it? Or don’t you think of it at all?”

“I read it with interest.”

“Um. Oh, well! Don’t you think the chorus beginning ‘When the hounds of spring are on winter’s traces’ great?”

“Yes. I mean no. Have you written any more lately?”

“Er—what? Oh! No! I’m just a scribbler at present. I shan’t be mature for some years. But, take a tip, and buy my first editions when they come out. Yes, I’ve written a sonnet or two since I saw you.—Er—would you care to see them? Oh, damn, I haven’t got them with me.”

“In that case, I’d like to see them. But, first, will you throw that yellow tie away?”

“Certainly, Mrs. Fairfax,” he said, ripping it off and throwing it out of the window. “Good-morning.” And, shaking hands with William, he went out.

“Did you notice the old-world courtesy, Billy? Poor old Julian—always full of beer and Swinburne, neither of which I care very much for—but, then, I’ve got no taste. He has asked me, or rather begged me, to dine with him one evening next week at Corvano’s restaurant. It’s his twenty-first birthday.”

“Will you go?”

“No, I don’t think I shall. I’m rather worried about Jay Doubleu. He’s got something fine in him, but it is covered by silly traits that time, I suppose, will work

out of his nature. But that applies to all of us. I wish he'd go and do some work."

He regarded her with bright eyes and happy face.

"You know, Lina, I think you're jolly fine with men."

"My dear, what makes you say that?"

"You're so generous. You see the good in human character. You never emphasize the weaker side in people you could afford to despise, I suppose, if you wanted to."

"Silly Billy," she said, coming to sit by him, "Silly Billy, you don't know me at all. It's because you have a big heart that you say that. I love you more than ever. Kiss me, decent man. You haven't kissed me since the Victory Ball."

"Eveline, first I must say something——"

"Oh, very well, don't, then!" and she went back to her writing desk.

"Mummie, can Quillie go out on the Leas?"

"Not alone, darling girl. Quillie might get stolen."

"Quillie would like that."

"Why?"

"So's Willum could rescue her."

"Precocious huzzy!" cried Eveline, snatching her—"hug mummie close. Quillie is mummie's own daughter. Kiss mummie, my silkenhair. How mummie wishes her own hair were soft like Quillie's and not coarse and thick."

"Mummie."

"Yes, darling!"

"Is Jay Doubleu coming again?"

"I hope not, darling."

Silence, while Quillie caressed her mother. Then a murmur of "Mummie."

"What, Sweetheart?"

"Can W-W-Willum live with us always when daddy goes back to—ther—East?"

"My dear, what a question! I wish he could!"

"So do I, mummie."

"Why do you wish he could, Quillie?"

Silence again, and gentle breathing; child head snuggling closer, bare arms twining tighter, and the soft confession, "'Cause Quillie loves W-W-Willum."

"W-W-Willum," mocked Eveline, "you are the spit of your naughty mummie."

The letter was posted, and the three went for a walk along the promenade. Jonquil walked between them, holding their hands, her pale blue silk pinafore blown by the cool sea breezes. The sunhot asphalt burned through the thin leather of their shoes. People sitting on the seats were interested in them, and sometimes smiling remarks were made about the child. They walked to the bandstand, and sat down in the front row of the deckchairs. Jonquil espied a friend, and darted away to play with him—an urchin with a fat collie pup. Billjohn rushed after her. The band was playing a soothing air. He lay back in the chair and with closed eyes yielded to the golden happiness given by the sun on his face. He suggested that Eveline should do the same, but she preferred, he was told, the protection of a wide hat.

"You liked the sun in Devon."

"This is Findlestone, where it isn't done to take off one's hat."

"I thought you were so unconventional."

"Dear William, you talk too much."

Jonquil returned with the squirming pup in her arms, at which the spaniel was playfully leaping, declaring

that she wanted five shillings, in order to pay a little boy.

"You can't have that mongrel. Tell him to take it back."

"Here, take your mongrel back," Jonquil ordered the grinning urchin, who called the pup and swaggered away.

Their position was such that everyone passing could see them. The first friend to come up was a stripling in the uniform of a cadet: he passed twice before deciding to go to them.

"Hullo, Peter," smiled Eveline.

He saluted stiffly, and gave William a timid look.

"Do you know Captain Maddison?"

"Yes, I've met him before. How do you do, sir?"

William rose and shook hands, saying:

"Don't call me 'sir' again, whatever you do. Lord, I'm only twenty-two! Come and sit down."

"Thanks awfully."

He hesitated for a moment whether to sit beside Eveline or William, and sat beside William.

"Peter, the wind's so cold on my left side."

"Oh, thanks awfully, Mrs. Fairfax," said Peter White, happily.

"What have you been doing with yourself, Peter? I haven't seen very much of you, have I?"

"I only had forty-eight hours' leave last time, and I meant to write and apologize for not turning up to tea. The fact is—I mean to say——"

"You were blotto, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Silly child! You know it isn't good for you——"

"I suppose I am an awful fool."

"Not so bad as that, my dear. How long are you here for? When did you arrive?"

"I arrived last night. I've got six days——"

"Sick leave?"

"Yes," he grinned, shamedly.

"Swinging the lead again?"

He confessed that he had not been so ill as he had insisted to the medical officer.

After an hour with him, William realized from his manner that he was in love with Eveline. He felt no jealousy, only pity, since Eveline did not love Peter White. He liked him very much: the boy had a radiant mind. Peter White's head was boyish and well shaped, with a little chin, mobile wide mouth, and snub nose. The alert, hazel eyes showed a temperament too sensitive and emotional; it was obvious as they talked that Peter was trying to be friends with himself. And at tea that afternoon, the invitation for which gave him an obvious delight, he discovered that he was passionately fond of wild birds, and of the writings of W. H. Hudson.

"I've got most of his books, Captain Maddison. I'll lend them to you. *Far Away and Long Ago* you will love. Miss Ogilvie—you know her, don't you—has got it at present. It's a most beautiful book. Mrs. Fairfax read it, didn't you, Mrs. Fairfax?" he asked eagerly.

Eveline, sitting on a low stool and talking to Tubby Lorayne and Miss Pamment, looked up. "Who's that taking the honourable name of Fairfax in vain? Peter White. My dear Peter, only tradespeople are allowed to call me 'Missis Fairfax.' To the others I am Lina."

She looked steadily at him, and he blushed.

"Now, tell me what you want."

He stammered that it was only about a book.

"I was telling Captain Maddison——"

"You mean Bill?"

"Y-yes. I was telling him that you had read a book called *Far Away and Long Ago*. It's wonderful, isn't it?"

"Perfectly splendid, my dear. How about some more tea? Will you run and get a jug of hot water? Thanks so much."

Eagerly he went out with the jug, and while he was out of the room she said: "Dear old Peter, he's as excitable as a child. Frankly, I didn't read the book, and I didn't have the heart to tell him so. Don't ever say I told you that, for heaven's sake."

They laughed amusedly. William felt a savage rage, when Peter came back he talked to him only, but Peter seemed to have lost all heart, as though he had heard what she had said. Soon afterwards he left the flat.

The return of Major Fairfax from London was to be made just before dinner, according to a telegram which came at noon on the following day. William was sitting on a lionskin at her feet, awaiting in silence the dread arrival, when a chance remark recalled the incident of her careless acquiescence. Although he persuaded himself that she had said it in order not to hurt Peter's feelings, yet a persistent pain of doubt remained. He thought, too, of the incident of the time-table and the Scarlet Cranesbill, but dared not mention it. Her hand straying through his hair made sharper the pain, so that suddenly he knelt at her knees and hid his head in her lap.

"Once you said that love was the only justification

of life. I thought that it was dreams. I was wrong. Eve, my beautiful one, I should die if I lost you."

"Would you, Billy?"

"I am tortured when I think of your many, many friends. Damn those men who treat you with familiarity!"

"Dearest Billy Tornsox, why so fierce all of a sudden?"

"I can't help it. I must tell you, or die. Why should they flaunt your beauty as though you were someone other than Eveline Fairfax? Why should you write for nearly an hour to a posing little, bl—, beastly little nincompoop like that fellow Collyer!"

"Lorlumme, the lad nearly swore! Poor Pat!"

"Damn Pat!"

"Jealous little thing."

"I'm not jealous."

"You are."

"No, Eveline, not in the way you mean. I am not jealous of you, but jealous for you, for your beauty, for your spirit. I would be content to be your watch-dog—to consider myself a knight, your knight, would be an impertinence—to devote my life to guard you. You are very precious, Eveline; to me you are, O, as glorious as the sun."

"So you are content to guard me, are you?"

"For ever!"

"For yourself, you mean! How like a man! Dear Lord Tornsox!"

"No, from others unworthy."

"In other words, you want me for yourself. Again I say, how like a man!"

"Yes, I do want you, but openly, what is called honourably, for your sake, and for——"

"Silly old fool, why wrap it up in all that involved talk! Still, it's part of your dream to do that, isn't it?"

"O Eve!"

"O Billy!" she mocked, looking at him with brooding sweetness in her eyes. He was humble before her, and she tilted his chin. "No woman could resist you at times. Not even proud little Mary Ogilvie. But you haven't wanted to kiss me when I've wanted to kiss you, so you shan't start now."

"Don't talk like that, Eve."

"All right. Let me finish. At other times you are a bore, and no woman—even Aunt Milly—could stick you."

He edged away from her, and said in an altered voice, "I don't understand you sometimes."

"How like a man!"

"Eve, I——"

"You're a clumsy old thing. Oddmedodd Bill—the scarecrow of love! I've been waiting for the scarecrow to come alive, for the vivacious and eager youth to step out of the straw and rags of mournful brooding, to say one thing—I've been waiting to kiss you, and you've been using as many words as possible, all mighty fine, no doubt, but a waste of time. Billy, don't you love me?"

"You know I do."

"Then why not say so?"

"I love you."

"You're a clumsy old fool, little wild boy with the brown eyes, but—I—adore—you—for it," she said, and pulled him to her. He hugged her wildly, groan-

ing as below in the road a boy with evening papers shouted his wares.

"Lionel will be here soon. The London train is in."

"Yes, I suppose so," he said dully.

"It's worse for me, beloved."

On hearing his whistle below, she sprang up, tidied her hair in the glass, and went outside, pulling to the door. But it did not close, and William heard him say,

"Well, old girl, it's been successful. But I may have to go off very soon."

"Oh, L-Linky, dear, I hope not," she said in a low voice.

Through the crack in the door he saw her arms round his neck, and the kisses that impulsively she gave him. He had a glacial desire to walk out of the house, but controlled himself; and almost immediately Major Fairfax was in the room, and greeting him cordially.

"Well, Bill. It's fine to be back."

He pulled a new pipe out of his pocket.

"Awful hot in town. Serious water shortage. I got this pipe for you—noticed your own was a bit battered. Straight grain—got several for myself."

"Haven't you got one for little me?" asked Eveline.

"I haven't forgotten you. Come into the other room, and I'll show you. Jove, I'm hungry—is dinner ready? Stopping, Bill—aren't you?"

"Thank you, major."

"Good man."

He was left alone, with a straight-grained briar pipe in his hand. Then, noticing some rug-hair and dust on his knees he hurriedly brushed them. In one of his socks was a hole.

Major Fairfax observed this after dinner, and Eveline at once ordered him to bring to the flat everything of his that needed repairing. The two pairs of socks that he brought a few days later were not worth mending, she declared, and, overcome with compassion for the state of his feet, she took him shopping. First she called at the Findlestone branch of the London Mercury and Outlook Bank, in order to cash a cheque. The manager asked her if she was entering for the Tennis Tournament.

"We confidently expect General Fairfax to pull off the men's singles, you know, Mrs. Fairfax."

"Yes, he's quite good, isn't he?"

"I was watching him the other night, playing with Miss Pamment. A really brilliant couple. For such a little lady the smashes and volleys of Miss Pamment's are really remarkable, don't you think?"

"I haven't seen her playing."

"Oh, yes. Awfully hot weather, isn't it?"

"I love it, Mr. Walpole."

"We poor slaves, you know, Mrs. Fairfax . . ."

The manager moved away, and Eveline pushed the cheque over to the cashier.

"Let me see my account, will you, please?"

The notes were flipped and counted, recounted, and pushed under the grill. A clerk brought the ledger, and she inspected it. The next call was made at a woolshop. Major Fairfax, as before, preferred to wait outside. William and Eveline went in together. "What colour would you like, Billy?"

"Auburn, for your hair."

"My poo-oor boy! as Aunt Margy would say. Carroty socks!"

"Then yellow—the colour of my favourite flowers."

"Daffodils?"

"No; hawkbits—a kind of dandelion."

"What funny taste! They're weeds," she said roguishly.

"Have you looked at the disk of one? Lovely things—small suns."

She smiled at the girl who was humbly waiting behind the counter.

"Let me see some heather mixtures, please."

She went to get some skeins, and said to William, "I, too, love dandelions. But not yellow socks. Besides, Jay Doubleu sometimes wears yellow socks with black and red lines. Beastly things. That reminds me, why did you pay that tenner into my bank?"

"What tenner?"

"You know perfectly well. I think that a mean way to treat a gift."

"But I was awfully grateful for the loan."

"Silly fool! Still, have it your own way."

"I'm very grateful."

"You look it. That's what Naps says, 'I'm very grateful.'"

"When's he coming back?"

"Naps? The lord only knows. I don't. He's gone north to the moors. My dear, we shall be eating grouse soon. I can tell you, it's very convenient having such aristocratic pals."

"It must be. Sorry I'm just a nobody."

"You're not. You're very big somebody—to me."

Eventually she bought needles, and nine two-ounce skeins of three different shaded wools, and with the

parcel under his arm they went into the brilliant light of the street.

"The infant wanted yellow, Lionel. Awful taste!"

"No, we mustn't let him do that."

They had ices in ginger beer and meringues at Corvano's restaurant, meeting there the aunts Millicent and Marjorie. Miss Fairfax was excited about a musical play to be produced on the following Monday at the Pleasure Gardens Theatre. The author, it appeared, was the son of the mayor of Findlestone. She had been given a box by the young playwright, and invited them to share it with her. If successful, and it must be, she exclaimed in her enthusiasm, it would in all probability be seen in the West End of London. She had read some of the lyrics, all written by Beverley Bogside, and declared them to be "little gems."

"I didn't think young Beverley had it in him, Lina. Especially after the foolish way he behaved over you, but, then, I oughtn't to have reminded you. That's all over, and forgotten, isn't it?"

"Will you all dine here with me, first?" invited William, and a table was reserved.

At lunch that day Eveline told her husband that Julian Warbeck had invited her to dine at Corvano's on the coming Monday, which was his birthday. She said that she had not accepted, as she meant to speak to him first.

"I would rather you didn't, Lina, old girl. I don't want you to be talked about, m'dear. Besides, I don't think you ought to have anything to do with him whatever. He doesn't live down here, does he?"

"In London, somewhere, I think."

"He ought to get back there, and do some work."

"He's supposed to be a poet."

"That's an awfully convenient thing to be. Personally, I consider that most so-called poets are indolent by nature, and are simply time-wasters."

"You're an old materialist, my dear."

"Possibly I am, but, then, I've seen more of life than you have."

"I wonder!"

"I don't."

"Oh, you're so terribly old and wise, aren't you, Lionel? Billy and I are young ignoramuses."

"Yes, I suppose I do seem terribly old."

"My dear, I was only ragging you." Her hand sought his under the table. Lionel went on:

"But it's a good thing, I sometimes think, that I am old."

"You're not, you silly," laughed Eveline, and he smiled indulgently at her.

"But do you really think, major," asked William, "that poetry is the child of indolence?"

"Certainly not, Bill. I meant that I've known a number of so-called poets—the East is bung full of them—and, to be absolutely honest, the majority of them are utterly undependable and useless. I have no theories about poetry. I'm simply stating facts. There are, I know, exceptions—men of clear vision, who live blameless lives, and whose achievements are magnificent because they themselves are magnificent. All a question of curbing, in youth, the desire to let things slide. But that's true of every one of us. All character that's worth a cuss is built up bit by bit. That's the sort of man I care about."

"Yes."

"Nobody's faultless. We all make mistakes. Some make the same mistakes several times. But they

needn't worry. A time comes when they realize it was a mistake, and they don't do it again. Result—head held a little higher, moral fibre toughened a bit. But it's all a question of realizing it for oneself. But you don't want to hear my platitudes. Have another cutlet?"

"No, thank you."

"Won't you really? You haven't eaten half a meal, m'dear fellow. Lina, shovel it on to his plate. Go on, Bill, get it down you—you want to fatten up a bit. Have another glass of beer?"

"Thanks."

As soon as they were alone Eveline said:

"At lunch Lionel was referring to me. He ought to have been a parson."

"I thought he meant me. It was not a pleasant thought. Eve, I think I am one of these indolent wasters he spoke about. The thought is not comforting."

"Silly boy! Of course it doesn't apply to you. Anyone can tell from your face what you are."

He said, "Then the blacker hypocrite I must be."

"Don't worry, Mis'r Meddlesome. It would never enable you to get anyone's fortune."

His dinner jacket, for which he had written to his home at Rookhurst, arrived two days before he would need it for the theatre. It was accompanied by a letter from his father.

*Fawley House,
Rookhurst,
11th August, 1919.*

My dear Willie,

Your letter was delayed owing to my temporary absence from home, and on my return I

was most pleased to hear from you. I send the suit as requested, together with a pair of pumps and some black socks, which (I imagine) will be too small for you. The whole suit (which reeks of lavender and moth-ball—but that is Biddy's business—blame her, not me), I expect, will be too small: it was made, you will remember, just before the war. Clothes are so very expensive now-a-days, and may I suggest that the coat, vest and trousers could be made bigger, if you get a tailor to open the seams. I am at present wearing a suit that has been turned (my old Harris tweed), and Biddy assures me that it looks "proper." Biddy, by the way, is as well as ever, and just the same. I have told her how happy and well you are, and she is delighted, and begs me to send you her love.

The Normans (so I am told—but cannot be sure) are in Findlestone for the summer. But you may have met them. We suffer a good deal from lack of rain, but it is a general drought, according to the papers. I am expecting your Uncle Richard to stay the night here shortly, bicycling on his way down to Cornwall. Recently I saw him in town—he looks fagged out, poor chap; he had a very arduous time during the war in the Special Constabulary, and was blown up by a Zeppelin bomb. Your cousin Phillip, it appears, is giving him cause for much worry, owing to the resigning of his commission, which as you know, was a regular battalion, and for no reason whatsoever, apparently. These are unsettling times.

Everything is much the same, and I live on, not quite knowing why. The garden suffers from want of rain. We had the Otter Hounds here last week, but they did not kill. The rooks have not come back

to us; the rifle and machine gun range drove them away. They have not yet begun to plant out new timber to replace that felled during the war. Colonel Tettley asked after you the other day. Peggy Temperley is going to be married soon, to whom I don't know. Mr. Temperley has bought a Ford car.

The Americans seem to be behaving in a peculiar manner, don't you think?—I mean in regard to France and the peace treaty. A great pity, after the splendid way they came over last year. As a nation they are magnanimous only by impulse—splendidly magnanimous, like some of the actions of immature youth. Wilson is a great man, but his type should never be a statesman, for his realm is higher, and his work is to inspire the minds of others when they are tranquil, and not concerned with material things like government.

Let me hear, when you have a spare half hour or so, how you are getting on. I have not any idea as to whether or no you have got a job in Findlestone, or how long you have been there. I am glad you have got such nice friends, and trust you will retain their friendship. That, in my experience, is one of the hardest things in the world.

Crawley must go with this to the post now, so I will conclude. Accept my best wishes, my dear Willie, from

Your affec. Father,

JOHN MADDISON.

I forward herewith a circular from your old school. Apparently they want particulars of your service, for the Roll of Honour. It has been here since June, but I did not know your address.

J. M.

Major Fairfax offered to lend William a suit when, with laughter, he tried on the coat. And in these borrowed clothes he took his friends to dine, at half past seven on the Monday night, to Corvano's restaurant in the High Street of Findlestone.

They entered through wide swing-doors, which were held open by a big flat-footed commissioner in a chocolate and yellow uniform, with gargantuan moustache and hands. His local name was The Beetle-Squasher. In the lounge dozens of copper-topped tables stood, with people sitting at them, drinking beer, wine, spirits and coffee served by untidy Neapolitan waiters. Corvano, a greasy and Italian Jew, lounged with his wife behind the bar. The people stared, including Julian Warbeck, who was dressed for dinner and reading an evening paper.

When they were seated at their white table in the restaurant, a place of mirrors that reflected infinite roomfuls of waiters, diners, and red and gilt upholstery, Julian Warbeck, with flushed face, went and sat at a table laid for two, near them. Of the soup he took a single sip, flinging the spoon into the plate and pushing it away. He put a cigarette into his mouth, felt for matches, frowned, and, rising, went to their table, bowing gravely and asking for the loan of a match.

"Have you such a thing? Thank you. I am compelled to smoke in order to ward off the pangs of hunger. That human carrion crow brought me soup that had hairs in it. Unlike those on the heads of human beings, they were numberless. Your matches, sir. Thank you."

He bowed, gave a cold look at Eveline, and returned.

"He's drunk," said Mrs. Beayne, "but the poor child

makes an effort to hold his liquor werry, werry well. And his wit pleases me."

His waiter, a misshapen foreigner who bore some resemblance to a crow owing to flapping coat tails, black eyes, coracoid nose, apparently no mouth, and absolutely no chin, brought a bottle of champagne and took away the soup. Julian, after an ostentatious inspection of the fish, groaned audibly that it was anæmic cod again, and gave it to a cat that was rubbing against his legs. Another bottle of wine was brought with the chicken, and at the end of the dinner a bottle of brandy. After drinking five glasses of this as quickly as possible, he called the waiter and said something to him. The waiter hopped over to their table, and said that the gentleman would be honoured if they would drink his health. William looked at Major Fairfax, who asked, "What do you think, Bill?" William referred to Eveline, who in turn asked Mrs. Beayne, receiving in reply, "Why ever not?"

So five liqueur glassés were brought, four and a quarter of them being filled. After hesitation, Julian Warbeck came over to their table and said solemnly:

"I would rather you did *not* drink my health. I have changed my mind. I have just recollected, with a recrudescence of pain and embarrassment, that Miss Fairfax, the last time I saw her, ordered me out of her father's house with words of a screaming voice about policemen *and* p—oo—um,—excuse me—p—prison! I care nothing for any of you. I heard the sneering remark of you, sir!"—glaring at William—"and were you not so obviously an outsider like your lank cousin I would—by god—O, why should I tolerate such insolence?"

He knawed his lips, puckered up his face, clenched

his right hand and gave an agonized look towards the ceiling.

"Forgive me, Lina."

"I should go home to bed, if I were you, Jay Doubleu," Eveline tried to soothe him.

"You want to get rid of me. You care for me no longer. You think I'm drunk, don't you—?" facing Major Fairfax, "but I'm *not* drunk. I'm *not* drunk. I've known Mrs. Fairfax for six months, nearly—I could tell you the very day I met her—and I asked her to dine with me this night—my coming of age. But that's nothing to do with anyone—no one cares about me. But wait! One day the world will listen to me—when I am dead! Oh, forgive me—but I'm not well. I have no friends—not even a Watts-Dunton, to whom I can crawl."

His voice changed, and, looking straight at Eveline, he said brokenly:

"You, Mrs. Fairfax, for whom I have the deepest reverence and respect, you promised to write to me about dining with me to-night. I have received no such letter. I hoped that you would come at the last moment. You came all right—yes, you came. Oh, it's intolerable, intolerable!"

Diners at the other tables began to turn and watch him. The human carrion-crow hovered near, moving about silently.

"I owe you an apology, Jay Doubleu—and, truthfully, I forgot all about it until I saw you here. Please accept my apology."

"Thank you. Will you drink with me?"

"Fetch a chair and sit down for a bit, won't you?" invited Major Fairfax. "Have a cigar. We've got to go shortly—to the theatre."

The chair was brought, and he sat down, while they drank his health. Just as William was about to sip, Julian protested.

"I would rather you did not drink my health, you—oo, um—excuse me, ladies!—you sneering beast."

"My dear Warbeck, I assure you I wasn't sneering!"

"You were! By god, I won't tolerate it. You shall *not* drink my health!"

"Would you like me to pour it back into the bottle?"

"What," roared Julian. "You long, lounging, insolent hound! By god, you are all against me. With the saliva of your pale tongues you would quench my mind-fire! You would drive me back to the gallipots. By god, Maddison, you dark devil, don't you look at me any more!"

"Look here," said Major Fairfax, rising. "Leave this table, or I shall call a constable and have you confined. Your brain must be deranged."

"Deranged? How dare you, sir?" The voice sank, "Yes, you're right. I am nearly burnt out. Yes, you're right. By god, it's quite true. O well! I—no—I——" Tears stopped the words.

They rose from the table and left him. Miss Fairfax was trembling with fear and indignation, and Eveline's face was inscrutable. They waited while the commissioner beckoned their cab, and William heard Lionel say to Eveline, "You see, I was right, m'dear."

She made an impatient movement of her shoulders, and went towards Mrs. Beayne. Turning round, William saw that the waiter was following Julian, who was coming towards them. Corvano intercepted him, and they heard Julian say,

"Put it down to my account."

"We keep no books 'ere, sar."

"I cannot pay now. To-morrow."

"Perhaps you care to leaf a guarantee, sar." Corvano touched his wristlet watch.

"Don't touch me, you greasy fungus!"

"I call plizman!"

"Intolerable insolence! I tell you I will pay to-morrow."

"What is your name and address?"

"I will not speak to you. Leave me. I will pay to-morrow."

Taking his opera hat, a cloak lined with blue silk, and a silver-mounted ebony stick, Julian Warbeck strode towards the swing door. The restraining hand of the proprietor was pushed away. But way to the street was barred by The Beetle-Squasher.

"Just a moment," begged William, going back to the restaurant. He went to Corvano, and said that he would pay the bill.

"Forgive me, Warbeck, but had I known that it was your birthday, and that you were expecting—I mean, that you were going to be alone, I would have asked you to join our table. I know how rotten and miserable it feels to be alone."

"Thank you. I can see that you are one of those men whose faces grow grey with their own pitiful breath! The world of men and women will conquer you, Maddison, and when it is too late the Garden of Proserpine will be closed against you. Ah, I am so weary. You're a chivalrous fellow, Maddison, I will remember you."

William went back to the cab. Nothing was said to him about Julian, but as they were going to their box, Eveline whispered that he was a dear.

CHAPTER VII

A 1919 THEATRICAL ENTERTAINMENT, AND THE DEPARTURE OF JULIAN WARBECK

THEY occupied the lowest box on the right hand side of the theatre; a very superior lady attendant showed them into their seats. Miss Fairfax sat nearest the stage: by turning round in her seat she could see almost the whole house; William sat next to her, a big box of chocolates on the lap of his intensely-creased trousers; Eveline, who apparently found interest in the people who sat in the stalls, was between Mrs. Beayne and her husband, politely attentive to the remarks that he made. After a while he spoke not at all, and sat back in his corner, hidden to all except those people in the front rows.

They watched the stalls that were nearly filled with men and women. The orchestra was tuning up; the conductor, who also played the piano in the middle of the space alluded to as the trenches by many successive comedians, was vamping softly to himself; the celloists were producing deep grumbles from their instruments; the fiddlers sending little plaintive sighs into the murmuring audience.

Mr. "Jimmy" Skinner, lessee and part-owner of the Pleasure Gardens Theatre, regarded the house through a monocle from the further entrance to the stalls. A

silk hat was thrust far back on his great rugged head, while a glittering fob hung from his chalkwhite waistcoat. He pulled at a long black cigar, and as he sent wreaths of smoke over the stalls he inspected methodically all the women. A tall young man appeared at his side, a young man with a conspicuous mop of yellow hair which flopped over a tall and narrow forehead. Miss Fairfax told William that he was Mr. Beverley Bogside, the author of *What Next, Dearie?* the revue they were about to behold.

"Such a genius," she told him, "such a witty and paradoxical talker. I wonder where he gets it from. For his father isn't a bit like that."

They watched the tall Mr. Beverley Bogside lighting a cigarette, puffing furiously at it, and grinding it under his foot. On a balled handkerchief he wiped the palms of his hands, thrust back spasmodically the yellow mop of hair, and disappeared.

"There's Miss Pamment with her mother," exclaimed Miss Fairfax, "just coming in. How absolutely ripping they look. Oh, to have money to buy nice things! How do you do?" she inclined her head, "and Sir John Lorayne. How graceful he is! How do you do! Just a typical sailor, isn't he?"

No one seemed to have heard her comments.

"And there's the famous artist. Oh, to be able to paint! And there's Sir Rudolph Cardew, the veteran actor, who is eighty this year. Isn't he lovely? How do you do, Sir Rudolph! There's Mary Ogilvie with her young cousin. Isn't she sweet, Billy—but I shouldn't have called you that, should I? And yet—Captain Maddison is so formal. May I call you Billy?"

"I wish you would, Miss Fairfax."

"Don't call me Miss Fairfax, please, Billy! Everyone calls me Milly. Won't you?"

"I would love to—Milly."

"That sounds so much nicer."

"And may Aunt Margy call you Billy?" said Mrs. Beayne in her deep voice. "Don't worry, I shan't ask you to kiss me next."

"I shall do that without asking, Aunt Margy."

"Here, you two!" laughed Miss Fairfax. "I feel quite gay. Drinking that man's health has affected me."

"I must keep an eye on you, my poor girl," said her sister.

The overture commenced, and the audience sat back and settled down in their seats. Once the overture was really going, Mr. Coutham-Platts abandoned the piano and waved his arms with an easy, familiar movement that seemed to entrance Miss Fairfax. A red light shone for an instant beside the conductor, a buzzer sounded its note of warning, and at the click of his baton on the illumined music-frame before him the orchestra suddenly subsided. An anxious pause, while he gazed round with uplifted arms; another tap, the lights in the theatre sank; with a sigh of indrawn breath the audience settled further into their plush seats as the haunting refrain of the chief song of the revue, *Your eyes tell me a story, dearie*, throbbed rhythmically to the roof.

The curtain swayed upwards, revealing a company of actors and actresses, and nearly synchronizing with a burst of song, the words of which were unintelligible to the listeners, but occasionally the terms *cocktail*, *jazzy-lad*, *sporty boy*, became distinguishable, and revealed that the play was not going to be like *Hamlet*.

In the middle of the opening chorus the ladies on the stage, clad in summer gowns and wide hats, turned and embraced the gentlemen in evening dress who stood so woodenly at the back against the swaying scenery, who gallantly raised their hats made so shiny by the aid of glycerine, all at the same moment, and wandered off into the wings, leaving the protagonists together in the centre of the stage.

From this point the plot unfolded itself with attention to detail and variety; the latter provided by an American gentleman in oversize evening attire who entered, with a grin at the audience, calling the hotel "some cocktail store." His entrance was only effected after great difficulty, for the door was of the kind that revolves, and he appeared to be unacquainted with its principle, and ran round and round at such a rate as to evoke roars of laughter from the audience, which terminated in a furore of applause as he was flung in, turning several somersaults the while, and landing at the feet of the hero and the heroine murmuring together and quite unconscious of what had happened. After an inspection of the lady's hosiery from the floor, he astonished her affectionate friend by kissing her, after which he again turned to the audience and licked his lips. Asked his name and business, he replied that he was a demobilized major-general in search of a job, and, on being referred to the manager, was about to disappear in search of that official when it so chanced that the official in question entered, a dessicated man with a bald head and a feather duster in his hand. The ex-major-general made several witty and paradoxical remarks to the manager, and raised his ire by appropriating the duster and asking him if he could be of any service to him; adding that his training in the

army had developed initiative, resource and personality, although he realized that otherwise his qualifications for the part of boot-boy or waiter were practically negligible. On his retirement with the manager—whom for some reason he addressed as Bo—in search of livery, the protagonists, who had been making remarks about love, broke into a crooning lullaby which was taken up by the audience when the entire chorus, entering from everywhere at once, and in curious steps, trooped on to the stage and pointed playful but accusing fingers at the lovers. The chorus finished, they went away with similar dancing steps, and the play took a tragic turn when an old gentleman with flowing side-whiskers made a tempestuous entrance in search of Claribel his daughter, who began to sob on a sofa in a far corner while her lover lit a cigarette and tossed the match among the orchestra. Her father gave her a week to decide whether she would marry a gentleman who wandered on later, a debauched and decrepit simpleton, a scion of noble family, or, refusing to wed him, she would be turned adrift with no prospect of inheriting his hundred million dollars made out of his pork-and-beans during the war. Claribel his daughter scorned the money made out of pork-and-beans during the war, and threw herself into the arms of her penniless lover, a thing which drew forth congratulations from the not-to-be-deceived onlookers.

After a series of remarkable coincidences, in which it was revealed to the marvelling audience that the poor suitor was a real peer and a detective as well, and that the Honourable William Rinkle-Wyse-Whistle (the decrepit scion) was in reality the leader of a notorious band of cut-purses journeying round the world to various hotels, followed too late by the detec-

tive, the curtain descended on the first act, accompanied by much noise from the orchestra, and those in the cheaper seats of the theatre made a rush to get beer before the refreshment bar closed. Sir Rudolph Cardew, the veteran actor, was observed to make a distinguished exit from the stalls, taking his famous hat with him. He returned no more.

Just before the commencement of the second act, Mr. Coutham-Platts—the conductor's name, according to the programme—resuming his seat, was greeted with cheers by the hoboies in the seats up by the ceiling. One man flung the remains of an orange he had been chewing, but it missed Mr. Coutham-Platts and disappeared down the mouth of the hautboy, causing irritable remarks from the pursesey fellow who blew it during the performance.

The scene changed to a market square in China. The music was conventionally oriental. The play commenced with all the players grouped together on the stage; Chinese ladies in a semi-circle, the principals in front—including the millionaire of pork-and-beans, who had apparently forgiven his daughter, at least during the opening chorus—and the same sunburned gentlemen behind in the same evening dress and shiny hats, and all singing in manly voices the words of a nostalgic song that was destined to become most popular.

*I want to tease my little pixie
That I've left down in Dixie,
I want to kiss her bright blue eyes,
And win her for a prize!*

*She's
The cutest,
The neatest,*

THE DREAM OF FAIR WOMEN

*The sweetest,
The most dinky
Peach I've known!*
*So when my wild oats are sown
I think I'll toddle home,
And
Tease my
Very homely,
Very lonely,
Very comely,
One-and-only
Pixie.*

The audience roared their applause when this wonderful lyric had been sung for the third encore; but someone, possibly a dissatisfied or a drunken soldier in the gallery, threw some halfpennies on the stage, which the ex-major-general, now a Chinese waiter with long flapping boots, a pigtail with a telephone receiver tied to it, and the imprint of a white hand-mark on the seat of his pants, picked up and asked *Who's given me another gratuity?* which occasioned much clapping from the hoboes in the seats near the ceiling: one being so carried away that he shouted out, "Write to *John Bull* about it," which suggestion was cheered by the riff-raff on the uncomfortable wooden forms beside him.

Next came the song of the evening—the song to whose tune half London and New York were to dance the following winter—*Your Eyes Tell Me a Story, Dearie*, sung in unison by the detective-peer—whose identity was as yet unknown by any except the audience—and the daughter of the millionaire.

"It is very beautiful," whispered Miss Fairfax, "very

beautiful and haunting. What a beautiful tenor voice that man has! What's his name?" She glanced at William's programme. "Aubrey de la Hay—what a handsome fellow!" The tenor began the chorus again, solo this time:

*For your eyes tell me a story, Dearie,
A story as old as the waves of the sea:
The words are as wise
As the light of the skies,
Which your eyes have made bluer for me.*

etc.

She looked at Eveline, who was leaning slightly forward. William looked with her, casually, looked away; back again. How sweet was her profile, and how the reflected light from the footlights made mystery of her dark eyes and eager lips. Never could man possess beauty, whether of flower or woman: always it would elude, its spirit would mock. In the contemplation of her face he did not hear what Miss Fairfax was saying. She sat next to the stage, watching him. No one coughed or moved in the theatre during the song. The audience was rapt, entirely quiet. William leaned back in his chair, swaying, his left hand on the back of Eveline's chair, steadying himself. Miss Fairfax, made emotional by the music, wondered why his face, which could be so alight with joy, was now so sad. But, she remembered, all poets were sad. She was speculating upon the cause of his sadness when she noticed that the face of Mary Ogilvie was turned in their direction; the girl was sitting only a few yards away. She was dressed in a gown of pale pink, and Miss Fairfax

realized that the oblique gaze of the beautiful eyes, so liquid and dark, was solely for the young man who was staring as though bewitched at her niece.

On the stage the last words of the last verse were floating in a golden cadence down to the listeners.

*Toil and Sorrow
Will not borrow
Love and laughter
Ever after
From my life.
If I have you, dear,
To bill and coo, dear,
You'll never rue, dear,
When you're my wife.*

Her own heart beating faster, since the sentiment had been for herself, Miss Fairfax took her eyes off Mr. Aubrey de la Hay, the singer, and started. For she distinctly saw her niece with a swift turn of her head kissing over her shoulder the hand of William as it rested on the back of her chair. Immediately afterwards Eveline caught her glance, and smiled.

"I was so carried away by the song that I couldn't help it," Eveline leaned across and softly said. "If it had been old Archie Dodder I would have done it. Milly, what a lovely voice——"

Again the chorus, a repeated duet, and then a storm of clapping ended the scene and the lights went up. She glanced quickly at William, puzzled, for he seemed indifferent to the kiss on his hand. Lina has shocked him, she thought.

The next scene was laid at a desert oasis, with palm trees, camels, sand, at evening. Apparently the band

of cut-throats had just left. The detective-earl and Claribel in Arab dress sat by a fire, eating dates. Far-away in the background sounded the muezzin call to prayer, a faint voice crying, *Allah is great, Allah is God, there is no god but Allah.* "And he lives down our Alley!" sang a voice from the gallery. Cries of "Hush! S-s-sh!" An evening star appeared simultaneously with a crescent moon. Wailfully sighed the violins, and the man began to sing a song called *Love a-dying*, and the words of it so pleased Miss Fairfax with their tragic truth that afterwards she said they might have been written by Ernest Dowson.

*"There's no love when passion's fled,"
You said; and shook your lovely head;
"For love, I'm sure, is wonder-giving,
Reason-drowning—and we're but living."*

*The wind once wandered o' the sea
A-sighing down the golden corn,
And whispered to the soul o' me
That you were she—so love was born.*

*Homeward through the wheat we walked;
As we went you laughed and talked
About the jazz—your dress—and yet
You wondered why my eyes were wet.*

It was, to judge by the applause, not very successful. Towards the end of the scene they observed that Julian Warbeck had entered the box opposite, and was standing behind the huge form of Mr. "Jimmy" Skinner, who, with the mayor, the author, and two ladies, was sitting there. Miss Fairfax made an exclamation of

astonishment, since during the former scene she had prophesied that by now he was lying in the gutter. The audience was left in apprehension for the lovers just before the curtain dropped, as with wild yells a band of Arabs rushed forward and captured them.

Apparently some sort of release was effected while the stage hands were rolling properties about behind the curtain, for the next scene was at Monte Carlo. Obviously meant to be drugged and in the state known as not himself, the hero was seen to be gambling heavily, and heard to be muttering several times *Curse muh luck*. A sirenic beauty with red hair made love to him and offered him wine as the croupier raked in shovelfuls of notes and gold. At last, ruined and reeling with stupor and misery, he was left alone, groaning. A veiled figure entered. Immediately after a cry of *Darling* and several kisses he recovered sufficiently to take his part in a duet, the effect of which was marred by the noise of voices in argument; and Julian Warbeck was seen violently to leave Mr. Beverley Bogside's box.

A comic interlude before the curtain, and then the audience was treated to Paris by night, with a students' rag at Montmartre, accompanied by airs that seemed always trying to be like *La Bohême*. Afterwards Miss Fairfax said:

"Oh, how I would love to go to Paris, to that jolly bohemian quarter. Lina, can't we go together on a Cook's tour when Li—oh!"

She put her hand to her mouth, and confided later to William that she really oughtn't to have suggested it when Lionel had been home only a short time. She talked vivaciously with him until the play began again,

when its reel and rush in exotic setting and gorgeous display absorbed her enthralled attention.

The final scene showed the Earl of Chewington married to Claribel, thus coming into his own and, supposedly, a good share of the hundred million dollars. With the aristocratic fervour of stage convention he announced that the ancestral pile need not be sold after all. Pork-and-beans was quite happy; he married his first sweetheart, a widow dragged on to the stage for the *finale*. The ex-major-general married the cook, who likewise sprang from nowhere. All the bronzed young gentlemen in evening dress—they were always in evening dress, so well-bred were they—managed to find each one of them the lady of his heart in the fashionable throng upon the stage. Everyone sang, everyone was happy. The principals took many calls, alone, and holding hands. William noticed that the hero smiled twice, with a flash of white teeth, at Eveline, and a feeling of terror came to him.

“We must wait and hear the Author speak,” thrilled Miss Fairfax.

Mr. Beverley Bogside soon appeared, nervously smoothing his flaxen hair. When there was silence he said:

“Ladies and gentlemen, I am glad you like my little effort. (*Cheers.*) You must not forget my father, Sir George Bogside, whose patronage made it possible for it to be produced. (*Cheers, a little laughter, and a common voice—‘Cut it out!’*) I must take this opportunity of refuting some objectionable things said about myself and the University of which I have the honour to be an undergraduate. (*The same common voice—‘Go hon!’*) it has been said that the ‘Varsities are be-

coming effete. My answer is that a new spirit is showing itself there. The days of *Sinister Street* are dead. But *Sinister Street will never die!* (*'It will only fade away,'* chanted a half drunken man in the gallery.) Oxford is no longer the Oxford of classic tradition. (*'By god, no!'* muttered another voice, like Julian Warbeck's.) I wish that gentleman would wait to make his remarks till I've finished. Look here, sir will you come on the stage? (*No answer—and laughter.*) Well, as I was saying, I have tried to give a little clean pleasure. The future of the drama, I believe, lies in a different direction to the old. We've been too dreary and serious hitherto. Why should the highest form of art be tragedy? Why not give joy a chance? What? I don't believe in plays like Ibsen's *Doll's House*, or Shaw's unpleasant plagiarised verbosity. The function of the theatre is to amuse, not to bore and weary and adapt the dithyrambic twaddle of mouldy philosophers. We've had enough of sombreness during the war—and now we're going to be merry and bright. That's the real way to help God. Once more I say, ladies and gentlemen of Findlestone, thank you for your kind appreciation."

He was cheered and clapped for over a minute, and lit a cigarette to show his self-possession.

"He'll be famous," declared Miss Fairfax. "Oh, what a genius! And what a blow he struck at Bernard Shaw! And he's quite right, too! It is the new spiritual awakening of youth we've read so much about. We *have* suffered enough in the war, and we want happy things now. Don't we, Billie?"

Yes, he nodded.

"Well, did you enjoy it, Bill?" asked Lionel quietly.

"Yes, thank you very much," he said.

"There, I knew you would!" cried Miss Fairfax happily.

The two men looked at each other.

Eve had bubbled with joy and laughter at what she called the delicious absurdities of the show, vowing that the author had written with his tongue in his cheek. Major Fairfax had at times looked a little weary; at other times a little amused. William's mind had been like a bird beating its wings against the theatre roof, desiring escape to the quiet stars that flickered in the wind on the downs. He thought of the summer night, of Eve with him, holding his hand, while in the dusk ring plovers called *tu-lip tulip* by the marge of the sea. Almost morose, thought Miss Fairfax, as he followed them down the red-carpeted corridor to the lounge, unspeaking; but her quick romantic sympathy contradicted, as he dashed forward to hold open the swing door and smiled at her as she passed.

Outside the theatre, underneath an arc-lamp that showed the stark whiteness of his shirtfront, stood Julian Warbeck, his cloak thrown over his left shoulder. Seeing them, he took a long pull at the cigar he had recently lighted, and dropped it on the pavement, respiring solemnly in its direction a length of smoke. Then he swept off his hat, and took three strides towards them.

"Forgive my intrusion, but I want to apologize. Major Fairfax, sir, have I your permission to speak a moment with Mrs. Fairfax?"

"What do you want, Jay Doubleu?" demanded Eveline, in tones of quiet finality.

"I am going away to-morrow by the early train."

As he made this announcement he looked unflinch-

ingly at her eyes, and drew in through his nose an audible breath. Eveline said:

“I am very glad to hear it. W-what are you going to do?”

Her voice with its deep-throat stammer, with its subtle inflexion of an impersonal caress, seemed to agitate him inwardly, for a frown as of pain creased his wide forehead. He looked on the ground, making with his shoulder a slight gesture of despair, and in a voice of controlled roughness he said,

“I realized many things to-night. I realized that I had been a fool. I am still a fool, but nevertheless I am going away.”

“I wish you l-luck.”

“Thank you. I am going up to Oxford.”

He looked as though he expected her to show surprise and joy. In a calm voice she said,

“Write to me and tell me how you get on. Remember, I believe in you, Jay Doubleu.”

“You are very good.” He stopped, bit his lip, then went on: “Yes, you are good. I shall not easily forget your kindness to a friendless man. By—no, I shall not easily forget you. That insolent and debonair worldling Beverley Bogside is up at Oxford—at the House. His pernicious influence taints the air of the Corn and the High, once breathed by—well, you will laugh, but I don’t care—by the Master! By Swinburne! He had the insolence to tell me that he was composing an opera about Oxford! By god, he shall *not* foul the Master’s Alma Mater with his filthy foul jingle tunes.”

“Come, Lina,” murmured Lionel. “Warbeck, we must go now. Good luck!”

“Thank you.”

“Good-bye, Jay Doubleu, and good l-luck! Mind you’re not sent down!”

“All men of vision are sent down from Oxford.”

He gave a piteous look at Eveline as she turned away. William saw his eyes wet with tears, and went forward to shake him by the hand. The last sight he had of him as he walked in the direction of home was striding into darkness beyond the artificial light.

At the corner of The Paragon they bade good-night to the aunts: William said that he would see them safely to their house although they protested that it was not necessary. Eveline whispered to him, “Come back after,” and he moved off with the aunts. At the gate he shyly kissed them both, and returned. Up the stone steps he leapt to turn the handle and to find that the door was locked. He waited a minute, two minutes, then went away in the direction of the Leas. It was after two o’clock when he let himself into his lodging down in the lower part of the town, watched by a policeman whose tread was silent. He found Billjohn couched on his pyjamas, beating his tail furiously.

CHAPTER VIII

EVELINE AND MARY

THENCEFORWARD every evening after leaving the flat he used to sit by the sea which gave absolution to the repressed miseries that became active with the sinking of the sun. He longed for the hour before midnight, when he might be shriven by the priestlike dark of the shore. No one was told of these wanderings, but Lionel noticed the change come over him. His gaze was usually abstract, and seldom did he look for more than an instant at either of them when they were together. Eveline being alone with him for a brief while would ask him why he was so strange; and when he said nothing she would say tenderly that he must not pine because she simulated affection for Lionel, whom she could not bear to hurt, as he was so kind and considerate to her.

“Listen. When you are with us, dearest, I feel an affection for him that is a genuine fondness; but when he and I are by ourselves, I feel that I cannot tolerate his presence. If I am sitting quietly meditating, he will ask me if anything is the matter, and when I say that I was just thinking, he wonders what it is. You see, the male spirit always tracking me to my most secret and remote retreats, where is only room for myself! Even the happiest lovers have solitary tracts of the spirit to walk alone. But he doesn't understand that.”

“He loves you, Eve. I know he does. I’ve watched him.”

“In his own way, I suppose he does. I wish that he did not.”

“I suppose you wish that about me?”

“Now what makes you ask such a silly and unnecessary question?”

It was cool in her high drawing-room, with the wide-flung window and pale lemon curtains lazily wafted and filled by the sea wind. He was restless when Lionel joined them, and went up to Jonquil’s night nursery in the attic, climbing into blinding sunlight through the window on to the leaded roof that scorched where hands and body touched. They heard him moving above, and Lionel, taking another cigarette from the silver box he had won at polo, and tapping it on his broad thumb-nail, said to Eveline who was busily knitting,

“Bill’s an extraordinary fellow, but an awful good one—the best type, a little too sensitive, perhaps, for the hurlyburly of this life of ordinary mortals. A case of late development, I should imagine. Isn’t it Shaw who said that the highest creatures take the longest to mature, and are the most helpless in their immaturity? He has such a curious air of being unaffected by experience which for a fellow who has been through a public school and nearly five years of war is remarkable. And at eighteen years he was fighting on Gallipoli—a boy still—too young to stand the shock of war. He was telling me the other day about his boyhood, and his friendship for a fellow who was killed, and, d’you know, m’dear, I was profoundly moved by seeing the wistful joy in his face at those simple memories. He might have been sixteen, and relating the exploits

to his gov'nor—how they built a hut on an island, noosed pike in the lake, made fires in a spinney, and got rooks' eggs in half-a-gale. Jove, old girl, it must be fine to have sons, and to watch them growing up. . . . How about going on the hills this afternoon? The breeze will be great up there. Let's ask young Mary, for Bill. By Jove, yes, of course. We ought to have had her round here more. Why didn't you think of it before?"

"Well, she's such pals with the Normans, isn't she, and you know why they hate me, just because I was——"

"I know, m'dear, but you mustn't worry about people who don't understand and who don't matter in the slightest. They are simply snobs—but all of us are snobs in one way or another."

"You are a dear," she murmured, kissing him impulsively. "I'll ask Mary for the afternoon."

Jonquil went with them. The broad Roman road curving at the base of the encampment, that had been beaten by the feet and chariots of the cohorts which had made it and outlasted the artillery tractors, the lorries, and the troops twenty centuries afterwards, was brown with dead weeds and grasses. William as they walked slowly along it thought of the grass that had been growing in humbleness throughout those centuries, while men had wrought and made their bitter wars, and perished. Mary walked silently at his side, and asked a question that, it so happened, had a direct bearing on his thoughts.

"If there was another war, would you fight again, Willie?"

"I suppose so."

"But you said the other day that you were a conscientious objector."

"I do say silly things—often, I'm afraid. I say them sarcastically to smug people, in a fury at their apathy and blindness—it's wrong, I know. Still, I am a conscientious objector, but rather than that women and children should be murdered, I would willingly murder my own beliefs."

"That is true courage."

"Oh, no. You see I don't care whether I live or die." At this moment he had not the strength of his vision to uphold him, and was acutely conscious of loneliness and lovelessness.

Eveline and Lionel were walking behind them, and a long way in front Jonquil was hopping about like a fairy with Billjohn prancing around her.

"You oughtn't to say that, Willie."

"It's true."

"Things will come all right, Willie, if you do not allow yourself to be turned aside from your true self."

"I suppose that means you think that because I'm always with Eveline that I am like those other men. Mary, I thought you were a bit different from the herd." She did not show how he had hurt her, but said simply,

"Your friends that care for you and take the trouble to understand you know that you aren't really like those other men—or like some of them, for not all are evil."

"I've got nobody who really cares about me."

Mary looked as though she were going to say something in her quick eager way, but the thought wavered in hesitation, and was not expressed. With almost a

birdlike stillness she walked on the brown grass by his side, her tread quiet and even, except when the iron-tipped heels struck upon a stone. A touch on his arm, and he was to look at Jonquil, who was rolling in her white silk frock with the dog upon the grass. Mary said excitedly,

“She is a darling child. It must be beautiful to have a daughter like that—you are responsible for her, and yet she is no part of yourself, but a separate breathing being that is all her own.”

“Jonquil, stop rolling on the grass, you dirty child,” sharply called Eveline, some way behind them. William winced.

“Oh, all right,” said Jonquil, getting up and running on till she and Billjohn were as small as a white butterfly and its cast brown chrysalis.

They went up by the same track he had climbed in the night. Half way to the top they sat down, declaring that they could go no further. The sun high in the south-western sky was like a blistering splash of quicksilver aroll in a crucible of blue porcelain. Mary moved aside with her finger the grasses, peering for shells and flowers. She found a hawkbit that with spread disk was drinking colour from the sky, and Eveline told her that it was Bill’s favourite flower.

“Put it in his buttonhole, my dear.”

Mary did not pick it, but continued to touch its toothed petals gently with her forefinger.

“They are most beautiful flowers, Mrs. Fairfax, when you look into them. I haven’t the heart to break the little fellow from its earnest root.”

“Here you are then, Billy,” said Eveline, picking one and tossing it across to him, “Here’s one that isn’t quite

so earnest as Mary's little fellow. He says he would like to be worn in your buttonhole."

"Thanks very much," said William, feeling such a happiness that he sprang up and ran to Jonquil, who was picking all the flowers she could find.

"W-W-Willum!"

"Er—hum?" he mimicked.

"Quillie trodded on a bumble bee and killed it. Look!"

"Oh, Quillie, what will the poor bee-babies do?"

"Well, you see, Willum, it bit Quillie."

"But bees don't bite, Quillie. They sting."

"Er—hum. But this one bit Quillie, and nearly stang her, too, making Quillie dam well fed up with it. Let's climb to the top and you be a English soldier, and I'll be a Bore."

"You'll never be that, my dear."

"Only in pretending, I mean. I'll shoot you."

"Oh, I see. You mean a Boer. It's too hot."

"Yes, it is, isn't it, Willum?"

"Yes, my darling."

They sat down on the strawlike grass. Jonquil snuggled close to him. Because she was so like a miniature Eveline, because she was lovely and feminine and appealing, he put his arm round her, while love surged in his heart, not like a turbid stream, but like the wind which bore the glistening thistleseeds in the shining air.

"W-W-Willum!"

"Yes, my sweet."

"Will you marry Quillie when she grows up?"

"If you like."

"You do love Quillie, don't you?"

"Very much."

"Better'n Mary?"

"Er-hum."

"Honest to God?"

"Hush, Quillie! Yes, really."

"Then will you give Billjohn to Quillie?"

"But he's already given to Mummie."

"Er-hum. I know. But Mummie said to father that she—that she didn't want Billjohn, not *really*, only she said she did so's not to hurt you."

"Look at that lovely butterfly over there, Quillie."

"Isn't it beautiful. Don't let's kill it, shall us?"

"Oh, no."

The clouded blue settled on a scabious head, opening and closing its azure wings for joy of the sun. It was cool on the hillside where the wind stroked the harsh bents and drove up into scarlet flight the soldier-flies that dwelled in the grassy wilderness. Below them brown cattle were grazing as they moved along their chalky paths. A swift shadow glided over the grass; looking up they saw a hawk veering across the windy uptrend. Mary saw it, too, for she called, "Willie!" and pointed. Upwards they climbed.

On the earthworks the wind came like the spirit of water, cool and boisterous, rushing by unseen, pouring over Cæsar's Camp. Mary trod on the swarded ramparts, leaning against the airtide which moulded the light garments against her slim body. William leapt up beside her, drawing a deep draught into his lungs, and breathing out slowly with an exquisite content. Afar the glittering sea stretched into summer mist that hid the French coastline. Steamers like dark smouldering hayseeds approached and passed with infinite slowness to east and west. Findlestone sprawled at the

edge, a heap of soiled and crushed bricks that in places flickered silvery flashes where from skylights and windows the sunlight glanced.

"I often come here," said Mary, "and listen to the wind music. Everything makes a different noise—the broad grassbents and the tussocks, the thistles, the carlines, and even the short rootlets on the turf. And I'm certain I've heard a harebell ringing."

"Quillie has, too."

Mary had not known that the child was behind them. Jonquil lay on her chest in the fosse, swinging her legs and biting at grass. Mary realized that he was not listening to what she said. Lionel and Eveline were climbing to the summit a hundred yards away; he was staring at them. The wind lifted his hair; the colours of the schooltie he wore were dull and drab. Billjohn lay panting in the shade behind them. A hawk shadow cut across them; a rising lark stopped singing, and dashed to the ground. Turning suddenly to her, he said with bitterness in his voice,

"You see, nothing is allowed to remain happy for long."

She looked at him, hesitated several times, lost a little colour in her cheeks, then said quickly, while her brown eyes seemed to grow larger and to take to themselves a soft auburn glow, "I've often felt that I wanted to come between you and the things that would steal your happiness."

He looked away from her.

Jonquil began to hum and sing, and they listened to her song about a bee that was killed by a cruel little devil.

"Aren't I, Willum?"

"What?"

"A cruel little devil."

"I'll whip ee, my maid!"

"Quillie wouldn't cry. But sorry she swore," she said gravely.

"You dear thing."

"But Quillie killed a bee dead."

"Well, it's gone to heaven now." Aside to Mary he said, "The conventional remark!"

"Has it? I hope it won't sting God," said Jonquil.

Mary, who had been sitting still, nervously touching the grass, suddenly laughed. "I know it's very wrong, but I can't help laughing."

"But why should it be wrong, Mary? Do you believe in God?"

She nodded. The colour had returned to her face.

"I'm afraid I don't. Hope I haven't shocked you. But I believe in man."

"Dead or living?"

"Alive, of course."

"What's the difference between a dead man and a living one?"

"Something you can't see—his spirit."

"Some call that a part of God, Willie."

"And do you think that God loves us?"

"When we love, that is God."

He shook his head. "Mary, I thought no more of God in man when I had fought in France. Once I bayoneted a German in a trench raid who was unarmed. I just killed him. A poor little undersized Saxon, about eighteen, I suppose. He was in a dug-out, reading. He lifted his white hands in funk when he saw me. I took the book back as a souvenir. Poems of Keats—translated into German. I got the Military Cross for that raid, which was, owing to the

feeble troops against us, particularly successful. God in man."

"Yes, speaking now."

She took his hand and held it. Her face lost its wind-colour again. She was terribly in earnest, and spoke rapidly. He saw her eyes soften, become wild and brooding, soften again.

"Don't you believe in evolution, Willie?"

"Yes."

"Towards perfection?"

"I suppose so."

"Towards the godhead, Willie?"

"How about birds and animals?"

"And you ask that who have heard a nightingale singing!"

"Yes, yes," he muttered. "Each species is given its means of protection and livelihood."

"Man has risen out of the ruck. He can help God by his brains, by helping himself. Oh, Willie, if only you would believe! The world must have leaders. It is like a lost child crying out for its mother. Love—the mother-heart, Willie. Oh, think of Abraham Lincoln—he had more of God in him than most men, and think of the great good he did. Perhaps you wonder why I talk like this to you. I had a dear friend, a poet, who died in the war. I nursed him in hospital. To hear that man talk! I felt I must take off my shoes—the ward by his bed was holy ground. And he who hated war went back, almost a cripple, because he wanted to be with the men of his company, and was killed crossing the St. Quentin canal. His body is gone, but not his soul, or perhaps I should say that which spoke through him. It changes, like Shelley's cloud, but it

cannot die. Though the sun flames out, it cannot die. It is God, Willie."

Even in the vivid sunlight a soft sweet fire seemed to illumine her face and throat. Her black hair, her dark eyes, her shrinking maiden gentleness combined with the sudden feminine beauty, gave him a curious feeling, and he could only turn sideways, as though heedless of her, and touch with his finger tips the empty shell of a banded hillsnail.

"I know these things, but I cannot put them into form. Only a man can do that, Willie. Sometimes I think that the sexes are not so unevenly made as it would seem. The woman bears the child, when she has taken to herself the seed, and perhaps it is for the male to fashion the spirit in the physical frame. Women make men dream, and the woman wants the dream for herself, because she is the high priest of the life-to-be-formed. All things shape themselves for this."

"You have a wonderful spirit, Mary," he said humbly.

"I wouldn't talk to any other man but you, lest I be misunderstood." She spoke with fear in her voice, and seemed to shrink again.

"Poor bee, quite dead, never see his babies, poor bee, Quillie killed you, la, la, yes, she did," sang the child, far away and happy in her sundreams, waving legs thin as the grasshoppers that chirripped while waiting for love and the evening dewdrops.

They sat and watched her, Mary with the dark brooding in her eyes, William with ecstasy strange and wild as never felt before.

"I will live only for mankind," he muttered, and getting up he sat by Quillie, taking her in his arms and kissing her several times. She lay inert, with serious

eyes, and to his surprise she cried, struggled free and ran from them round the fosse.

He climbed to the summit and stood beside the flag-post, looking down at the fields in which the corn was being cut. Tiny horses were drawing the reaping machines, tiny men propping the sheaves into stooks; there was the faint rattle of the machines and sometimes the tiny pop of a gun, and the coursing of dogs. Mary sat where he had left her. The black patch of the bonfire he had made on the night of July the nineteenth had been disturbed only by wind, which had winnowed the ash and left charcoal and charred ends on the baked earth. A scattered flock of rooks and jackdaws passed over the hill, cawing and goistering. To the left the line of downs dipped into a valley grown with oaks, and a mile beyond on the slope a chalk quarry had been carved. Patches of gorse grew on the downs, sheep were straying, there was a scent of thyme in the air, and always the burring of bees.

Mary got up and climbed to him, sometimes slipping, but scrambling to her feet again. She did not look at him. Together they ran down the reverse slope into the fosse, seeing the others standing by some gipsies on the road behind the encampment. A bay horse unclipped and ungroomed was hobbled near, and cropping the grass. Lurcher dogs approached in silence, pointing at Billjohn, who pranced about and told the god of the dangerous objects. Three brown barefooted children ran forward and begged for coppers, padding at their elbow. A fire smoked under the hedge, a cooking-pot by it, and fresh skins of rabbits were drying in the sun. A baby wrapped in a sack slept beside the wheel of an old unpainted caravan. Two young men sat under the hedge, straws in their

mouths, and a white-haired crone squatted in shade on the caravan steps, smoking a black clay pipe. They took no notice of the newcomers, and the lurchers did not growl, but sniffed with casual intentness at the excited Billjohn.

Jonquil stood by her father, listening to a brown young gipsy woman telling her mother's fortune. Smilingly Eveline sat on the ground, her hand in the gipsy's rough lap.

"Yes, my good lady," she was saying, "you will be very happy, but sorrow will come, and like a thunderstorm in summer. Your best friend will fail you, but you will find strength, my good lady, great strength, my pretty one, in one who is always faithful. But your heart will carry you through, my pretty one. Do not give it too quickly to strangers, my lady. You will see many stars, and some will fail; but keep a brave heart, my pretty lady. Won't you let me cross your palm with more silver, my lady, for the good fortune that a true Chal has told you. Very hard to live, my good lady, and we can make no baskets of green grasses, my good lady, because they are all dead. Bless you, my good lady, for your heart is kind."

"I did hope you would say something about a dark, sardonic lord, and danger," said Eveline. "Didn't you, Lionel, what? Hullo, Billy. Wherever have you been? Let her tell yours."

"Won't you have yours done first, Mary?"

She shook her head quickly. "No, you have yours told."

"Only half a crown, my lady. I can see you have a good fortune, my lady. I can see it in your face, my good lady. But let me tell you of that nice gentleman that I know you're thinking of. Only half-a-crown-

my lady. Two shillings. I am a true Chal, and am as old and wise as the earth. The stars speak to me at night. Come, my lady, only two shillings."

Mary looked appealingly at William; and her lips framed the whisper: "Let her tell yours, Willie."

He gave the gipsy half-a-crown, and she took his hand upon her weather-stained lap.

"You have much before you, my gentleman. You must never lose hope, my gentleman. Many women will want to follow you, but only one is true, my gentleman. Beware of sweet laughter, my gentleman, and do not always obey your heart. You have a journey, my gentleman, a long long journey, but your feet will not falter. You draw life from the stars, my gentleman. Many secrets will be told you, and you will cross water, but you must not turn back, for water to you is as treacherous as a snake in a bird's nest, my gentleman. You have a lady who loves you, my gentleman, and you love her, and will not look at others, my gentleman. Bless you, my gentleman, for you have a kind heart. Now, my lady, let me tell your fortune."

But Mary shook her head and smilingly said "No."

"Quillie, let the lady tell yours," suggested Eveline.

"No. Quillie don't like her," declared Jonquil, getting behind Mary.

The baby in the sack awoke, and began to cry. Jonquil went and stared at it.

"What an ugly baby," was her opinion.

The mother of it, the fortune-teller, picked it up and retired to the shade of the caravan, on the steps of which she sat, unfastening her bodice and putting the wailing infant to her breast. Jonquil looked at her with intense eagerness, but said nothing, and walked

seriously behind them to a hollow where they decided to have tea.

While he prepared a fireplace of flints, and she spread the cloth, the others went off to get wood. She did not speak, and after a minute he asked her what was the matter.

"Nothing, Billy. Why ever should there be anything the matter?"

"You didn't speak to me."

"I didn't like to interrupt your thoughts. Once—once you used to share them with me, but now you never tell me anything. But, my dear, I do not want you to do anything against your wishes. I want you to be happy. That butter will run to grease in the sun, I'm afraid."

China mugs were laid in a row, and the vacuum flask containing milk taken out of the basket. A pot of guava jelly followed, with cakes and a paper spill of the china tea.

"Eve, I can't—I can't—I mean, Lionel . . ."

"Of course, you can't, my dear Billy. But you need not be so callous at times. O, I know you suffer, I have eyes, my dear. You are not the only one, remember. There are three of us—possibly four. I hope no one takes sugar, for Martha hasn't put any in the basket. Billy darling, you do love me still, don't you?"

She looked tenderly at him, and he muttered "Yes."

"Do not fret, my dear. Things will arrange themselves for those who are faithful and true. I suppose if anyone heard me speaking like this, they would say I was a low hypocrite. Perhaps I am, but I do suffer, Billy. I am not always kind to Lionel, and I reproach myself for it, but I do try to be decent. I have no love for him, only affection."

"What would he say if I told him that we loved each other?"

"Billy, you aren't going to do that, are you?"

"Don't feel alarmed," he replied, forcing a playful note into his misery. "I wouldn't be so treacherous!"

"You are unkind," she lamented, "and you know well how to w-wound those who are fond of you. My dear, if I went away with you, I should only be a drag. You are as wild as one of those swifts above us. And, Billy, you will hate me for saying it, but if we did take the final step, we could l-love, but could we live? You told me you had only your army gratuity. And that won't last for ever, will it?"

"No," he sighed.

"Whereas at present you should try and think of others a little. Don't be hurt, old boy—it's bad friendship that doesn't help by telling the truth about things like that. God knows, I'm selfish enough myself."

"You are most generous."

"There's Mary with some sticks. Isn't she a ripping girl? The only woman in Findlestone that I would really trust. Perhaps Milly—but Milly, poor old dear, wouldn't understand."

"You aren't going to tell Mary about Devon, surely?"

"What do you think? I tell no one."

He stuck four short sticks into the ground and built up within the flint wall a small hut of the thinnest twigs. Inside he put a sprig of dry furze. Around and over the hut were placed sticks, like a wigwam. Everything was done most carefully, and the process watched excitedly by Jonquil, amusedly by her father, eagerly by Mary. Eveline sat apart and said, "Hurry up with that there prize fire, Will, my lad."

"I must arrange the stones exactly right, or most of the calorific energy will be lost."

"Damn your calorific energy. I want some tea to quench my terrific thirst. Blast the smoke."

"Lina, remember the child," reproved Major Fairfax.

"I know worse than that," his daughter informed him.

"Don't you let me hear you, or I will have to punish you, Quillie."

"No, all right."

William put more sticks on the fire. Immediately the furze crackled, smoke made him cough, and the flames bit the sticks. The kettle was put on. When it began to sing, Jonquil claimed that she knew what it was saying.

"Tell me," said her father.

"There's a droppo water inside that—that's lost itself, and is running round hollering for its ma."

"It's what?"

"Hollering for its ma. It's lost, silly. Martha and Quillie once found a lost little boy, and I gave him a sweet, and Martha said, 'He's hollering for his ma, lovey.' See, don't you?"

"I don't like your language very much; it's hardly that for a lady to know, Quillie."

"Martha isn't a lady—she's a old woman instead. And she says 'Thank gord for it!' She does really, Father—you needn't look so unbelieving at Quillie. Don't she, Mummie?" appealed an unhappy Jonquil.

"Yes, my darling, of course she does. Mummie will have to speak to Martha about it, but Quillie isn't naughty at all for saying it. It's perfectly natural. She's mother very own darling. No one shall hurt

Quillie—she shall grow up as free as a wild bird. Mother will not let her white little soul of childhood be warped by restraint into what is called a woman of the world like herself. What else is the kettle saying, l-little Quillie?”

“Quillie can’t hear any more,” she said, almost tearfully.

“I can hear a dog growling inside,” Mary told her.

The child forgot her misery, and put her ear near the kettle, so that the auburn locks fell away from her ears fragile as burnet roses.

“Quillie can, too. And a l-little swallow. And a starling. And—and a old man selling be-nanas and choklicks on the beach. And—and a noise like M-M-Martha singing a song as she brushes Quillie’s hair and says ‘Old still, lovey. Good-bye, Dolly, I must leave you, though it breaks my ’art to go.’ Like the soldiers of the Queen singed when they went to catch that wicked old Kruger, who ate babies!”

Major Fairfax lay back and shouted with laughter, a thing William had not seen him do before.

“Quillie, your father is amazed by you. I never thought you had it in you.”

“You never play with Quillie.”

“Father’s been away fighting all the time, hasn’t he, Quillie?” said Eveline. “Mind, Mummie’s darling, or you’ll be scalded!”

The kettle tunes lost themselves in a soft rumble, and William emptied the spill of tea into the water. They sat round the spread cloth, feeding a stern-swinging Billjohn with tit-bits. Afterwards they explored the encampment, Lionel and William together, and the others at a distance.

“I’ve chucked smoking till after the tournament,”

said Lionel, as William filled his old pipe from an oil-skin pouch. "You'll come and watch us, won't you?"

"Rather. I like watching your partner play. She's so full of life, and it's a joy to watch anyone like that."

"I know what you mean. Here, light your pipe inside my coat, out of the wind. Bill, I notice you stick to your old love very faithfully."

The matchbox was dropped. William knelt down to recover it, and struck another match kneeling down.

"What do you mean?" his voice said from the ground.

"I haven't seen you smoke that pipe I gave you yet."

They went down the hill to the three girls. The wild kestrel soaring above them uttered its wistful cry; in the tussocks the free grasshoppers sang to the sun.

CHAPTER IX

A LITTLE DINNER PARTY

HE changed into the borrowed suit that evening, since Eveline was giving a small dinner party, to which the Pammets, Sir John Lorayne, a doctor from the Quorncliffe barracks, Mary Ogilvie and a cavalry subaltern named Mr. Tollemache were invited. Afterwards the aunts came over from Radnor Park Gardens for coffee and liqueurs, and the evening was a vivacious one for everyone except William, who sat by an open window. The room was filled with a soft light from the shaded lamps, the evening air was cool, the modulated murmur of voices rose with the mist of Egyptian cigarettes. Above the stack of the house across the way a large star was shining, sometimes dulled by invisible smoke from a chimney pot. Mary was asked to play the piano, the Missouri Waltz being requested. She played it, and then some of the airs of *What Next, Dearie?* Tubby Lorayne began to dance with his betrothed; William watched the star. When the music stopped he looked across the room at her, and met the full gaze of her eyes.

"Will you play some Debussy?" he asked.

"Yes, rather," she said, "if they want me to."

"Do, please," came a polite chorus of assent.

She played the *Sunken Cathedral*, then an Hungarian dance; after which they said, "Don't stop, please,"

Major Fairfax saying, "If only I could play like that! Mary, you're a genius, m'dear."

"What shall I play?" she said quickly, with timid glance, nervously.

"Oh, any old thing," said Eveline, glancing wickedly at Lionel.

"Remember this, Willie?" Mary looked across the room to him, and began to play *Elëanore*. He went nearer to the window, so that he might see more of the sky. The melody was broken in the middle, and the preludian trills of *Hymn to the Sun* sent his mind wandering far from the life of streets and houses. At its conclusion they said that it was jolly nice.

"It's like the Taw estuary at night," said Mary, coming across the room to sit beside William. "When there is a frost, you can hear the feeding flocks of curlew and golden plover calling in the darkness. It's like a thousand golden bubbles rising out of the water."

"Golden plover are simply toppin' on toast, Mary," remarked Mr. Tollemache, who had been glancing at William almost contemptuously. "Come back and do some rags, what, Mrs. Fairfax?" and their hostess laughed.

Mary played them. Friendliness brooded in the warm shaded light of the room. William took no part in the conversation. Mrs. Pamment was talking to Mrs. Beayne and to Major Fairfax about her eldest son, his Captain's "doggy" in a battleship in the Bosphorus. Sir John Lorayne and Miss Pamment were sitting side by side in a deep couch talking in intimate and subdued tones. Miss Fairfax was preparing herself to make a recitation; Mr. Tollemache, the tall youth with china-blue eyes and blond shiny hair who had been dressed as a rajah at the Victory Ball, was talking

to Eveline about some runs he had recently had with the Devon and Somerset Staghounds.

"You ought to come down, Mrs. F., you ought really. You'd get some simply toppin' runs. We killed a twelve-pointer the other day out of Horner Wood. I tell you, it beats fox-catchin' hollow. Only you need two gee-gees for each run."

William looked out of the window at Spica Virginis which now seemed to be resting on the rim of the chimney pot. Miss Fairfax recited; gave an encore, sat down again, looking hot. People passed in the street below, their laughter and voices audible in the air of the summer night. Upon the pot edge quivered the point of light, until it dipped beyond and was lost.

The handle of the door was turned, and they heard Martha's voice saying, "You come out of there, lovey."

The door opened, and Jonquil's head peeped round. "W-W-Willum!"

"Quillie, you naughty girl, go back to bed this instant!" said her mother in tones of surprised pleasure.

"Quillie wants Willum a minute. Come on, Willum."

She came into the room, in her flannel sleeping suit, barefooted. All the women petted her, especially Mrs. Beayne, while Martha grinned happily at the door, and said "She would come, miss."

He went upstairs with her, led by the hand. She sat on a chair. "Willum, can you hear anything?"

He listened.

"Only the sea."

"Yes, but what else?"

"Your feet on the rung on the chair."

"Silly! Look over there! Can't you hear it crying?"

She pointed to a piece of sacking lying by the grate.

"Why, of course. It's a baby. Where did you get it?"

"It's Quillie's. Quillie had it after supper. The doctor brought it to Quillie in a black bag. It's now crying something awful. Isn't it, Willum?"

"No."

"It is."

"It isn't."

"Oh, Willum, do pretend!"

"I can hear it now. You must get it into bed and keep it warm, or it will die. Good-night."

"W-W-Willum, don't go, or if you do, I shan't let you be its father any more. But if you stay, I will let you be the father of all my other dolls, and my teddy, which was borned before I met you, but I will say you are their daddy."

"Right-ho, my faithful spouse. Now I must go down, and you must go to sleep with your baby, or it will die."

"Yes, Willum."

She took a sort of rabbit from the sacking, and leapt into bed, holding it to her heart.

"It's stopped crying, hasn't it, Willum? I say, do you think that baby the gipsy had was stolen?"

"It might have been."

"It looked a gentleman's baby, didn't it?"

She tugged him down, giving him several kisses.

"'Night, Quillie."

"'Night, Willum."

He went downstairs. Mary was sitting on a hassock near the window, looking out at the night. Her small head was resting on her hands. Eveline gave him a swift tender look, which eased not his suffering heart. Mr. Tollemache was seated beside her at the piano,

performing with her a musical exercise known as "chop-sticks."

"I say, Mrs. F.," he said, "you've got a simply toppin' idea of rhythm, really you have."

William spoke to Mrs. Pamment and to Lionel; Mrs. Pamment made room for him beside her, asking him to tell her about his cottage. She was kind and her manner sympathetic. He told her about the otter cub and the seagull, forcing himself to talk lightly. But all the time he listened to Eve's voice, and heard what it was saying so vivaciously to Mr. Tollemache. He spoke ramblingly, tightened his mind; faltered, flushed. In an embarrassing silence the voice of Mr. Tollemache was heard saying, "Well, if I can get the motor-boat you'll come? It will be simply toppin', Lina." He had called her by this name a minute previously.

"Rather, Jerry, I'll come," replied Eveline.

"My sister has a place near you in Devon," said Mrs. Pamment to William. "You must go and see her when you return to your romantic castle."

"Yes, I will, thank you," he replied, while unnoticed on a stool Mary was watching his face, hands under her chin, her eyes dark and patient, as if suffering.

CHAPTER X

HEAVIER BURDEN

MAJOR FAIRFAX and Muriel Pamment were knocked out in the final of the tennis tournament for which they had practised so hard, and when with his wife and daughter and guest he got back to the flat Martha met them at the door with a telegram.

"I didn't bring it to the ground, mister, as I knew you'd be busy playing. It come soon after you'd gone."

He tore open the orange envelope and spread the flimsy sheet, then handed it in silence to his wife and looked at William with a composed smile.

"My dear," said Eveline in a low voice, pressing his arm, "how utterly miserable!"

"Don't worry, old girl. I expected it, you know. I've been lucky to have had so long. Marching orders, Bill!"

"When for, Lionel?"

"Says forthwith, but that means twenty-four hours' grace. I shall have to go on Monday morning. Damn!"

"I'm coming with you," declared Eveline, "that is, if you'd take me as your groom or batman. Now if I were to dress up in uniform and cut off my hair, no one would know the difference."

"Wouldn't they? You'll hear from me, darling, if you cut off your lovely hair!"

It was the first time William had heard him use the word darling.

"Nevertheless, I shall come," she averred.

When Lionel was in his bath, Eveline and William were in the drawing room. He stood by the window, looking down the street towards the sea, and she sat on the couch, turning idly the pages of the *English Review*, which William had bought that morning because it contained a nature poem by John Helston. He said he would go.

"You can stop here if you want to, Billy. But don't let me prevent your going if you prefer to be with other people."

"You know I don't."

"I don't know it. I can go only by your behaviour, which is rather extraordinary. Why can't you be happy and contented, like Sir John Lorayne or any other man? He said to me when you cleared off during the tournament that your behaviour was peculiar. His term was 'wet,' and although I found it hard to follow his curious sailors' talk, yet the meaning was obvious."

"Why? Because I feel half the time I am no more to you than any one of half-a-dozen others."

"Oh, you exasperating man! No wonder Elsie Norman wouldn't have anything to do with you, if you behaved to her as you behaved to me. Couldn't you see that the whole of Findlestone, all the old cats, the old screws, the has-beens and the dead-old frumps, there this afternoon, were quizzing me and talking about me? I wonder how many engaged girls other than Muriel Pamment would have remained quiet while I sat with Tubby? None. Muriel is a decent girl herself, and a decent girl is as rare as a chicken in a new-laid egg."

“What would you expect any other girl to do? Bash you on the head with a racket, or aim balls at you?”

“Oh, shut up!” She laughed. “I’m not addressing you, my dear. I’m sick of myself. But seriously, Billy, you’re a devilish awkward child to manage. Quillie is a plaster angel to you, and she’s a wild little demon—and the very spit of me, poor kid! Bill, why did you leave me this afternoon?”

“You like snubbing those who care best for you, don’t you?”

“I spoke mostly to Tubby because you were in one of your introspective moods, and I didn’t want to interfere. You think that’s a lie, don’t you? So it is. I’ll try again, like my old ancestress of the garden who, I bet, shook a shower of crabs on Adam’s napper. I addressed most of my remarks to the *matelot* because, one, he is bright; two, he is cheerful; three, he is about the only man I know who doesn’t introduce the personal note into the conversation; four, I don’t wear my heart on my sleeve for female vultures to peck at; and five, if you want to monopolise me you must do a little work for it. Bow-wow, W-William! You’re a funny old thing, aren’t you, my dear,” she added on a reflective note.

“I care for you so much,” he said, going to the window, “so much, that I can think of nothing else. Certainly not honour.”

“I hope you are not going to talk about honour, because I can assure you that a woman’s standards are not a man’s. That, I believe, is elementary knowledge, a thing which you lack in an astounding degree. Or if you have any, you don’t show it. But you will learn a lot from me before you’ve finished, and what you’ve learned you will not forget. And when that

time comes, remember that Eve was, according to her own standards, honest."

"I know you are," he said, like one in pain.

"Come and sit by me, quietly. Just hold my hand; hold my hand, Mr. Meddlesome, and do not be unkind. Be just your dear natural self again."

She lay back with closed eyes, breathing quietly. He sat upright, staring at the sky through the window. The minutes went by. He began to think that she cared for Lionel more than she liked to admit. He suffered. Martha in the kitchen could be heard laying plate and cutlery on the wooden tray. The splashing in the bathroom ceased, and a man's voice was heard humming intermittently. She lay still. The bathroom door clicked, and his hand was squeezed and held. He did not move. On the thick carpet a foot made a dull thud, and Lionel looked round the door.

"Shall I turn the water on, Lina? Aren't you feeling very fit, old lady?"

The eyes opened, freeing tears that rolled down her cheeks. She leapt up and went without a word swiftly past him and into her room.

Lionel sat where she had been sitting beside him, and with deliberate movements selected a cigarette, tapped it on his thumbnail, and lit it. He drew deeply at it, inhaled the smoke and released it through mouth and nose.

"Bill."

"Yes, Lionel."

"I want to ask you something."

William nodded. Lionel inhaled, and exhaled slowly.

"I want you to promise me that you will be a pal to Lina—will you, old man?"

"Yes," and he cleared his throat.

"Bill, I have a deep regard for you. I liked you from the start, and my experience of men is not small. I'm going to tell you something, so that you won't have to worry your head when I am gone. Now I think that you can help Lina a lot with your friendship. She's very fond of you, y'know. You needn't look so alarmed, it's a fact, so you'll have to put up with it!" He exhaled a tremendous cloud of smoke, and tapped the ash on the floor. "Lina's a mixture of all sorts of things, wild as a Dartmoor pony, impulsive and generous, sometimes foolish and sometimes inconsiderate, but that's only because she's young, foolhardy and often unthinkingly rash. But you probably have gleaned all that already. People talk about her, of course; they do about everybody who is out of the ordinary run. They talked about her and Lord Spreycombe, a man I don't like and don't want her to know. She's promised me she'll drop the fellow, and I'm awfully glad. She's so intensely alive that she sees no harm in doing things that another woman, less vivid, would think twice about doing. But I shan't be here to help her—I—well, I won't go into the question of why she isn't coming out East with me. She will later, when she's settled down a bit and had her fling and sown her girlish wild oats. Now look here, Bill, when I'm gone, mind you come to the flat as usual, won't you? It will be good for her, and good for you. I'd ask you to stay here in the spare room—but you understand, of course. But come as before to meals, old man; come just as before, and have a good old rest. You deserve a rest after the bitterness of war, and it will do you good. You'll find that when

you return to your painting you'll be all the fresher, and won't want to chuck any more canvasses and brushes over the Corpsnout, ha-ha!"

"Bill, don't be offended, but to-morrow—you understand—my last day—Lina and I will probably take a luncheon basket and the two-seater and spend the day out somewhere, perhaps at Dymchurch or Rye. But come to breakker as usual, and Martha will give you lunch and tea, and you can take Jonquil out, if you wouldn't mind being nursemaid for once, or Martha can look after her if she's too troublesome. And I hate to ask you to keep away, it seems so beastly selfish, but you understand, old man, don't you. . . ."

The next morning, walking with Jonquil on the Leas among the people taking the air between church and Sunday dinner, William passed a man in a wine-coloured reefer suit and wide brimmed felt hat whose face was familiar. The man was apparently puzzled when he saw him, for he stopped and looked for recognition, and passed on, only to look back and meet William's turned head. Mutually they went back.

"I know you, surely," said the man. He smiled, showing white, even teeth; he spoke in a resonant, clear voice; his features were good, and his face was sunburnt, but not as deeply as most of the male visitors on the beach below.

"Your face is familiar, but I can't remember where I met you. In the army, perhaps," suggested William.

"I was at Blackheath Art School a lot, with the Pay Corps. What crush were you in?"

"Yeomanry, and afterwards Reserve Cavalry," said William, as casually as he could, in order not to hurt the other man's feelings.

"Oh, yes? Lord, where can I have met you? At

the Green Room Club, perhaps, or in Town somewhere?"

"It might have been."

"Are you a pal of Sir George Bogside, or young Beverley?"

"No."

"I'm de la Hay, you know."

"De la Hay? That name is very familiar."

"Yes, it is, isn't it? The press agent, you know . . . one has to have someone to bang the drum in the profession. I've got you placed now! Weren't you with Mrs. Fairfax at the first night of *What Next, Dearie?* Of course you were, and looked daggers at me."

"I didn't know that Mrs. Fairfax knew you. I beg your pardon," said William.

"Oh, yes, I was introduced to her by a mutual friend. Lord, she's as pretty as a peach. If only she'd go on the stage, she'd make a splash in musical comedy. I suppose I ought to insist on it, for the honour of the profession."

Elsie Norman with Charlie Cerr-Nore and Mary Ogilvie passed them, and Jonquil darted to the dark girl.

"Don't let me keep you, old boy," said Mr. de la Hay, "if you want to join the ladies. I say, what did you think of my part in the show?"

"Awfully good," lied William.

"Honest business, old boy? You thought it a winner?"

"Well, look how they applauded!"

"And did you like my onions?"

"Your onions?"

"The sob stuff song, *Love a-dying?*"

"What a funny expression, onions!"

"But did you like the number, old boy?"

"Very good."

"Au revoir, old boy. So glad you liked my song."

Mr. de la Hay showed his white teeth and went away, and William hurried after his friends.

That afternoon he bathed with Mary and Jonquil, who hopped about in three inches of water, splashing and giving little squeals when a wave came. She danced and sang, not at all shy of the crowd by the wet cocoanut matting that led from the bathing building to the water. She said she didn't care for the waves, and stretched herself in the sun on the wet silver-nailed pebbles, but when a big ninth wave rolled and crashed she leapt up and threw stones at it, and shouted "Nasty wet old waves, Quillie thinks you silly. Take that, old waves."

They went for tea to the house of the merry Pamment family, afterwards returning to the flat. It was deserted and quiet, except for the snores of Martha asleep on a hard kitchen chair, with head fallen forward on folded arms.

"W-W-Willum, don't wake her," hissed Jonquil; "she's a bit fed up to-day."

"With Sunday dinner, I suppose."

"No, Willum. With life. Let's come to Grandfather's."

They went round to Radnor Park Gardens, and found the two aunts and old Mr. Fairfax in the garden, with the cat Tommy on his knee. Seeing Billjohn, it leapt off and flew at him, spitting and making a savage noise. Billjohn fled, and Mr. Fairfax shouted irritably:

"Tommy, Tommy, Tommy, goo' boy, don't be frightened. Call your dog off, Mr. Maggleton."

Billjohn yelled and fled round flower pots and over flower beds, with the furry fury after him smacking with clawed paws and spitting. The noise made several dogs bark in other gardens, and William threw a stone at Tommy.

"How dare you do that?" fumed Mr. Fairfax. "How dare you! Leave the house at once. No one asked you in. Go away, Mr. Maggleton, go away this instant."

"Hush, father, hush," begged Millicent. "Think of the neighbours. They can all hear."

At last Billjohn fled through the gate leading to an ivied lane at the bottom of the garden, and Tommy jumped on the wall behind his master. Billjohn stood and whined in the lane.

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"No use doing that now. The damage is done. Who let you in?"

"We walked in, sir."

"How dare you? Why didn't you ring?"

"I pulled the bell, sir, but unfortunately it came away in my hand. The wire was rusted through."

"What!" spluttered Mr. Fairfax. "You've broken my bell! And then you walk in?"

"I thought that better than running away. If you will let me send a tinker to-morrow, sir, I——"

"You must pay for it. Milly, see that he pays for it. And that window broken by an old boot on Peace Day. No doubt he flung it."

"Father, don't be silly. You'll make yourself ill. Billy, don't take any notice. Poor dear father is tried by the heat."

No doubt, thought William, since he was muffled up in a great coaching overcoat and a woolen scarf. The

old gentleman suddenly became less irascible, and asked William if he was a British Israelite.

"No, sir."

"Then you ought to be. Have you gone into the question? No, of course not. All godless, you young men, like that mad atheist Shelley, *whose books my father burned, sir!* The war was made by Satan. It was prophesied in the Old Testament, Mr. Magglestone."

"Maddison, my poor parent," murmured Mrs. Beayne, who had been sitting quietly during the animal scrapping.

"Maddison, hum, yes. Not one of the Wiltshire Maddisons, surely?"

"My forefathers lived there, I believe, sir."

"Then you must read about British Israel, because you come of a good stock, young man. Milly, fetch my books after supper. Mr. Maddison, you must stop to supper. Now, hearken to me. You read your Bible, of course."

"No, sir, I prefer reading Shelley," he replied coldly, disliking the changed attitude because Mr. Fairfax knew of his family.

"Then you must not read that immoral madman any more. This war would have been saved if the world had realized that the old prophets had foretold Armageddon. It was for the English to realize that they are the lost tribes of Israel, the chosen race of God. But they didn't. Here, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy, come on my knee, then, Tommy, Tommy, Tommy. No, they didn't believe it! They wouldn't listen."

"No, they wouldn't listen," said William. "They wouldn't listen, I mean your Jews—the tribe that

called themselves God's chosen! They paraded the same mouldy thoughts of God before One in whose mind was pure and living truth. No wonder he was a man of sorrows! I know how he suffered, sir—are you listening to me?—because ever since my adolescence I have suffered, because things that are so clear to me are incomprehensible to others. I have suffered since adolescence because everywhere I have been up against brick-walls of un-understanding. I will not listen to your remarks about the lost tribes, except to say that I hope no one will ever find them. They should have known better—those upper classes, the educated classes, of Jerusalem. They hindered the tender, sensitive, quivering mind of a genius by asking their petty, lawyer-like catch-questions—bringing coins with a Roman emperor's head embossed thereon: bringing a woman taken in adultery—trying to distress and torture and catch-out the White Bird of the sky singing from its soul with the voice of the Great Spirit of Beauty—not your conception of God, sir, or the conception of God of the lost tribes. And the lonely ones, who are winged themselves, know so well what the Greatest suffered: they know, because they, too, have suffered. And they know that the vast majority of people who profess and call themselves Christians have never known what it is to be tortured spiritually—tortured because none seem to understand them, and call them Blasphemers and Madmen and Atheists and Pessimists and other cruel names: and tortured because they see truth, and wish to tell it, but no one heeds them. Ah! how Jesus was tortured spiritually, all the long years before he taught, and grieved, and pined, and suffered, and glowed with celestial fire. What right have the untouched, the spiritually-

atrophied, to speak about Jesus the man, making his vision fit their man-of-the-world standards, confining in the cramped, dark cage of their dogmas and convictions the White Bird of the Sky?"

"It wasn't very long ago the Greatest of Poets died, sir. It happened before. It will happen again, with some lonely visionary who hasn't a living person believing the truth that is in him—until it is too late, and the White Bird is slain. Good-day, sir. I can stay here no longer. Billjohn! To heel!"

After this strange outburst he left the house of Mr. Fairfax, who gave away most of his very small income to the cause of proving that the English were the lost tribes, whilst he and his daughter Millicent, who had remained single in order to look after him, lived on the barest necessities of life. He was again distressed when he recalled this, thinking that it typified the devout stubbornness of extreme dogmatic conviction which thought of God as a director of the minutiae of each human life—which had made God in its own petty image. Blind and ignorant, he thought, and utterly failing to understand the Carpenter's Son.

He walked up and down the Leas, a pain at the base of his skull; and when Eveline appeared with Milly and Lionel, calling out "Billy!" in her charming voice, he longed to be alone with her, so that with his head on her shoulder he could find sanctuary from the thoughts that, like hounds, pursued him.

But such rest was impossible. After half an hour they departed, taking Jonquil, and he had to remain and answer as brightly as possible the bright remarks of Milly. She insisted on taking him home to supper, where Mr. Fairfax spoke seldom to him. At half past nine he complained of a headache, and said that he

thought he would go to bed. He had acute indigestion. Mrs. Beayne said to him at the door as she let him out,

“Good-night, my dear boy. Go home and have a good rest. I loved hearing what you said. If it’s any help, remember Aunt Margy believes in you, if only because you like dogs. Good-night, Billyjohn, my handsome bow-wow. Bring your nice young master to see us again.”

He went on the Leas, remaining there till the promenade was almost deserted, and every other lamp had been extinguished, a sign that it was nearly eleven o’clock. Then he walked down The Paragon, on the other side of the road, and in the shadow of the garden hedge opposite the flat he watched the lighted window at the top of the house.

A man on a bicycle with a long stick came and put out the big light at the cross roads. Two church clocks chimed the hour within a few seconds of each other. He walked up and down, the light in Eveline’s bedroom was switched on, so that both sides of the top flat were illuminated. At a quarter past eleven the drawing room became dark, but he did not move away. He leaned against the garden railings, his hand on his forehead and trembling slightly. The hall door opened, but he did not hear; and Lionel had come down the steps, softly on the rubber soles of his shoes, and spoken, before he looked up, wondering wildly if he should run away.

“What are you doing there?” enquired Lionel, curtly, as he crossed the road.

“I just happened to be passing,” he heard his own voice saying.

“It’s Bill! My dear old man, I’m sorry I spoke

like that. I saw someone hanging about, and constantly looking up—one can see quite clearly from up there—and I came to see. Hope I didn't scare you, Bill."

"No, Lionel, no."

"You sound a bit shaky, old man. By Jove, you're trembling. Come for a quiet walk to warm your blood. Nerves a bit groggy, still, I expect, after that blasted war. Cigarette?"

"Thanks awfully."

The darkness on the Leas was comforting, and they walked past the deserted Rest Camp, coming to the cliff path.

"Shall we go down to the sea?" asked Lionel, and he said "Yes." On the wooden seat under the trees they sat down, smoking their cigarettes, a muffled blackness around and above them.

The silence was oppressive. Lionel did not speak. William felt that he wanted to speak, and was waiting for himself to say something. A wind stirred the tops of the pines, making an aerial soughing remote and high above them; the waves rushed on the unseen shingle, paused, sucking back and waiting, then rushing forward again. Then he was aware of little noises all about them, squeaks so shrill and sharp that the ear nearly missed them. A leaf rustled as a mouse ran swiftly to its hole under the root of a pinetree.

"Bill, old man, I shouldn't stay up half the night if I were you. I know the restlessness of youth, but if you strain yourself now you will regret it so much later on. You haven't been looking quite so fit lately. Is there any trouble—I don't want to be inquisitive—but sort of elder brotherly, if you understand. You regard me as a pal, don't you?"

"Oh, thank you, Lionel. I—I don't really deserve to have a pal."

"Rot, utter rot. Look here, I'm rather concerned about you, and I'm going to take the risk of offending you. Now, I'm going to ask a dashed personal question."

"Yes."

"Are you worrying over any girl—I mean, of course, little Mary Ogilvie?"

He made no reply.

"I rather thought so. Well, Bill, take my advice, and leave her alone for a bit. Go away, and get some job, and work hard. Then things will come out all right. You see, if a decent girl like Mary is fond of a man, and knows, as she will, that he is fond of her, she wants to believe that he will go through anything to win her. A girl wants to be won, Bill, just as much as she wants to be loved. Now, forgive the next impertinence, and remember that I'm keen as mustard to help you, because I—well, I damn well like you."

"You're too decent," muttered William.

"Bill, have you got any private income?"

"Nothing. I've got about seventy pounds left of my gratuity; after that, I'm broke."

"Well, Bill, have a little rest first, and then see about a job. Carry on with your painting afterwards. I haven't seen any of your things, but I think you've got the qualities in you, not quite matured yet, that will make you all right. You've got sensibility—anyone can see that—and love of beauty and the true things of life. Meanwhile, get a job."

"Yes, I think I must. I feel convinced that sooner or later I shall succeed in my work."

"I'm sure you will. But it's usually a case of later, y'know."

"Lionel."

"Yes."

"I only like Mary as a friend."

"Oh."

Nothing was said while he lit a cigarette from the stump of the old one.

"Is it anyone else I know, Bill? Don't be afraid to tell me. Is it Lina?"

He did not answer.

"You silly old ass," said Lionel, patting his shoulder, "you're a bit afraid of me, I do believe! Well, I will tell you a secret—there's no confidence betrayed in the circumstances. You remember when I looked round the door yesterday? For a moment I admit I was surprised when I saw you holding Lina's hand. Then I knew by her eyes and the abrupt manner of her departing that she was upset by my going away. Thereby hangs another confidence, Bill. However, Lina told me afterwards how pally you had been to her, and how you had kissed her when you saw her distress. Why, Bill, that's the very reason why I like you so much—that spontaneity, saying and doing the thing you feel. Lina herself was surprised, and, as she told me, felt a warm affection for you."

After a pause he went on:

"I think your affection for Lina is a great compliment to her, and to me as well. Lina is a woman who attracts men—she has grace and beauty and that elusive quality that only the most feminine of women possess. I, as her husband, realize that I am in a sense the guardian of that beauty. You see, old chap, I am

telling you this because I know you are a decent fellow. . . .”

“I’m not,” said William.

“Nonsense, Bill! Of course you think so . . . what decent man doesn’t? Again, even the best of men think things that they are ashamed of, and the very fact of their being ashamed shows that they have the right stuff in them. Now, the advice I am going to give you is this. Do not waste yourself on anything that is not worthy of your true self . . . if you do, you will have to repay in bitterness and pain, one way or the other. I’m not referring to you personally: I’m giving you a sort of impersonal, irrelevant advice, if you understand what I mean by that.”

A note of strain seemed to have crept into the speaker’s voice. It went on hurriedly:

“I want you to be friends with Lina, for I am sure that you will be a good friend to her. If you go away, I hope you will be able to run down now and then and see her; and, above all, don’t take any notice of what people say—there are always a lot of mean men and women—with little, petty souls—who are only too ready to talk. You must know the sort of thing I mean, Bill, but don’t worry.

“And, Bill, don’t idealize women. Suffering lies that way. Face reality, Bill, and crush down the vision of what you desire—don’t idealize anyone too much—you will suffer, if you do——”

The listener made no reply. Through the dark a curlew whistled its sweet and husky journey-notes.

“Bill, my heart went out to you when I saw you standing by that lamp-post. I realized suddenly that you must be so very lonely without a mother, or sister,

or brothers, and a father you've lost touch with. I wish you were coming with me.

"Yet your way lies in another direction. A man must work out his own destiny, Bill. Go to London and get a job. Live carefully—follow your ambition, your painting, I mean, in your spare time, and then one day you will meet someone whom you will want to marry. I know, Bill: for I have felt as you are feeling now." A minute's silence and he said, "Well, Bill, what are you thinking of?"

"Nothing, Lionel," he said, feeling that at the slightest further kindness he would lay down his head on the patient earth, and burst into tears. In his mind he was seeing Eveline as she knelt before the fire, looking at him, and yet past him, with wet eyes, a woman weak and helpless and passionate, for she was in love with a man, and that man was himself. If only he had left the cottage and gone to sleep in the bracken, if only he had not set himself on fire by thrusting the torch of that auburn hair against his throat. He ought to have confessed about Devon—he was deceitful, treacherous, faithless. Yet he loved Eve, and now he was speaking to Lionel, whom he almost loved as much as one could love another man. In silence he despaired, till his agonized spirit broke from actuality and streamed with Shelley's wind down the golden trackways of the stars.

CHAPTER XI

DEPARTURE OF MAJOR D'ARCY FAIRFAX

AFTER an early breakfast at an eating house he hurried round to the flat. Outside a one-armed man with a scarred face, standing by a barrow, clicked his heels and saluted. He returned the salute, and said good-morning, while noting the four brass wound-stripes on the man's sleeve and the silver badge in his buttonhole.

"Beg pardon, sir, but would you tell the General that the outside porter is present."

"I will," said William; "but how do you know I am the General's friend?"

"Beg pardon, sir, but I thought you must be, as I've seen you about with the General so often."

"Very well, I will give your message."

"Thank you, sir," and the ex-soldier came to attention.

He stepped into the hall, seeing that the ground floor rooms were still in a state of incomplete decoration, owing to a strike of the workmen. Up two flights of stairs he came to the second floor, occupied, in Eveline's description, by a "disagreeable little red-nosed uneducated elderly man retired from a grocery business" who was at that moment, as at most of his moments, quarrelling behind closed doors with a bewigged woman, whom he claimed as his niece. Up the third and fourth flights, and he came to the door of the Fairfax flat.

He knocked, and waited. He knocked again, and after a further wait Martha came and opened it. The hall was piled with tin trunks.

"Why didn't you walk in as usual, mister? It wasn't locked."

"Martha, where are they?"

"In there, mister." She pointed to the bedroom door. "The missus isn't very well, mister. She's got one of her headaches, what she sometimes has when she isn't very well. She's very upset because he's going away, mister."

"Yes, I suppose she is."

He sat down in the drawing room and waited. He glanced at the papers, only to throw them down again. About five minutes went by, and a door was pulled open and Lionel strode into the room. William did not look at his face.

"Just coming, Bill," he said quietly, walking round the table twice, taking a cigarette, and patting his pockets for matches.

"Here you are," William offered.

"Doesn't matter—don't want to smoke, Bill."

The cigarette was thrown out of the window.

"The porter is outside, Lionel."

"Oh, good. We haven't much time. Lord, I hope I haven't forgotten anything."

"Shall I call him up?"

"If you wouldn't mind. Martha, where's the decanter?"

"Here you are, mister," gasped the maid, rushing in with a tray bearing decanter, siphon and tumblers.

"'Ave a good stiff peg, mister."

"Thank you. A little present, Martha."

He handed her a five pound bank note

"Thank you, mister, but I don't want that."

"Go on, take it: don't be so silly. And look after Jonquil and Mrs. Fairfax, won't you?"

"Yes, mister, in course I will. Don't you fret, mister. Here, drink a good stiff peg, mister."

There were tears in Martha's old eyes, and she looked at Lionel with a grieved expression.

The porter, who had been beckoned from the window by William, rang the bell, and Martha went out.

"Drink health, Bill."

"Your health, sir."

Major Fairfax raised his tumbler of almost neat whiskey, and looked straight at him.

"Here's good fortune to you, Bill."

"Thank you. And to you—I—oh, good fortune, Lionel!"

They clinked glasses and drank, or rather gulped.

"Hat, stick, gloves, waterproof. But it won't rain. Money. Note-case—matches—damn, I want some matches."

"Take mine."

"Thanks. Is that luggage gone? Will the man be late?"

"There's plenty of time. Isn't Lina going to the station?"

"No, we say good-bye here. You see—train—unbearable——"

"Yes, I see. Shall I go on?"

"Will you? Right-ho. I'll catch you up."

"I'll take your mackintosh."

"Will you? Right-ho. See you there."

"Aren't you going to say good-bye to the aunts?"

"Done that already."

"Well, I'll go now."

"Right-ho, old man."

William went out of the room, just as Eveline in the dove grey kimono, fastened by a silk rope and pompons, slipperless and loose mane of hair flying out behind, leapt up the stairs to fetch Jonquil. She looked at him in passing, without recognition or greeting. He went downstairs, pretending not to see the little man in the flat below peeping through one door, and his niece through the other.

He loitered till Lionel joined him, and quickly they walked to the station, finding that they had five minutes before the train left. They strolled slowly up and down the platform while the trunks were labelled for Southampton. Major Fairfax talked about a number of irrelevant things, and hearing the whistle of the approaching engine he took hold of William's left arm just above the elbow and said:

"She's beginning to realize that the hat she's looking for is on her head already. Bill, go and see her as before. She wants a real pal. And, when you go away, run down sometimes, won't you?"

"Yes, I will, Lionel."

"Twelve months. Well, it's worth it, Bill. I'll take my coat. Thanks. Smoker, please!" to the porter.

The trunks and boxes were dragged into the guard's van, people walked past seeking empty carriages, hatless heads looked out of open windows. Passengers found seats. The guard stood by with his green flag. Lionel jumped in and leaned his elbows on the frame.

"Good-bye, Bill."

"Good-bye, Lionel."

"Write to me."

"Yes."

"I'll be longing to hear about things. Use the car

when you want to. Go back and cheer her up now, won't you?"

The guard waved his flag, the whistle shrieked, the train moved.

"Look after Lina for me," came the last words, almost in lip movement, and William whispered "Yes." Until it rounded a curve and so hid him from sight, he stood unmoving, except for a hand sometimes waved.

When he walked into the room she was listlessly sitting on the couch, still in the dove grey kimono, with auburn hair loosely coiled. She greeted him quietly, turning her glance to rest upon him for a moment, as it swung back again from the window.

He said nothing, but stood by the chimneypiece. It was still early, and the sea breeze was hardly stirring. He looked round the walls, at the knobkerries and assegais, and other momentos of travel; at the water-colours and photographic reproductions of Rodin's sculptures; at the picture of Eveline herself, the blue-gray eyes that looked, even as they were looking now, past and beyond the beholder. She drew her legs up on the couch, so that the swan's-down slippers dangled from her toes. He moved sideways, wondering if she was seeing him; and she was, but with what a strange look.

She leaned back and shook free her hair, dividing it into two tresses, which she pulled over her shoulders and commenced to plait. He went across the rugs, and sat by her, so that his knee pressed against the pink feet. She looked at him over her right shoulder, the adorable head thrown back obliquely, while plaiting the left tress.

"Eveline," he said, moving nearer.

She drew away with a frown, which passed immediately into a smile of sympathy as with a quick movement she shifted to the other end of the couch.

"No, Lord Tornsox," she gently reproved.

"But I wasn't going to——"

"Don't do that, please. What you did was most natural. Have you had breakfast?"

"I have had kippers, cocoa and whiskey, thank you. That, I think, can be regarded as a meal more or less complete."

"What ever is the matter with you that you talk in that stilted manner. Is it whiskey? Are you the better for liquor, my dear Tornsox?"

She laughed, looking so like the little maid of the portrait, that pain increased in his heart.

They stared at each other, then detecting something in his eyes her face became blank, and she went on with the plaiting of the left tress.

"Shall I help you?" he asked.

"No, I don't think you had better."

"Shall I send for Martha?"

"No, thank you. Martha has her own work to do. Billy, I want you to be serious a moment."

"Yes."

"We mustn't go on any more."

"What do you mean?"

"We must end, Billy."

"End, what?"

"Why ask me questions? You know very well what I mean. Well, if you want it plainly, I'll tell you. You mustn't make love to me any more."

He said sadly,

"I had no intention of doing so."

But he winced at her immediate reply of: "I am

very glad. I feel an absolute swine. Honestly! Fancy confessing that to a man! I don't think I could to any other except you."

"Not even to Lionel?"

"Lord, no. And yet, I think he would understand."

"You say 'Lord, no' because you respect him. And for me you can have no respect."

"Don't be hurt," she begged him, taking his hand, which he let lie limply in hers.

"Listen, Bill. I really mean that we must finish. Otherwise I should hate myself more than I do, and I should hate you, and that would be really a disaster. You see, my dear, I've given my word of honour that I'll write and tell him immediately if ever I feel I like anyone more than him. That is his term—'like.' And I certainly don't want to have to write such a letter. We went down on our knees and he asked me to pray to God so that I shall grow to love him. Oh, Bill, I felt that my heart would break! I shall never love him. I wish I could!"

He said nothing.

"You understand, don't you?"

"Perfectly."

"Billy, don't be unkind."

"Am I unkind? I'm sorry. But I do understand."

"But you say it in such funny tones as though you didn't care. And I did so want you to understand that I am trying to play the game—a bit late in the day, perhaps, but I am."

"I do understand."

"Thank you," she said simply. "Now, I must go and have a bath. Shall we swim this morning? It's a topping day again. Poor old Lionel, in that filthy train! I wish he were here, honest Injun, I do."

"I believe you do!" he said bitterly.

"Of course I do! I say, Bill, you should have seen our daughter saying good-bye to paterfamilias. Kissing him demurely and holding out a polite paw. 'Good-bye, father, and hope you have a nice voyage. Quilly must go now, as Swally is crying!' Complete staggering of paterfamilias! Exit, right, to nursery."

"Poor Lionel!"

"Oh, I don't suppose he worries. He isn't very fond of children."

"All his capital is sunk in one big company."

"What does that mean?"

"You're his wife."

"He's awfully keen on his job."

"I speak metaphorically of his emotions."

"Then I'm going to bathe. Call a spade a spade by all means, but don't call it an implemental statum disturber. See you in twenty minutes. Come shopping?"

"Yes, I'll hang about outside shops with a basket, if you like."

He saw her in twenty minutes as she looked round the door in the dressing gown after her bath, but it was fifty minutes before she was dressed, and then she called him into the bedroom to fasten the back hooks of her white frock. They went round to her grandfather's, where she told them that she was "bearing up as best she could." Aunt Milly cried, "Of course you are, dear old girl." Aunt Margy chuckled deeply, and went on with her sewing, an occupation that appeared to be for her a whole-time one. Aunt Milly told them that *What Next, Dearie?* was going to be produced at a West End Theatre at the beginning of the New Year, and that Beverley Bogside, "flushed

with success," was writing another one, to be called *Why This, Darling!*

After ices and méringues at Corvano's, they went to swim, then to hear the Town Band. Mr. de la Hay, strolling with clouded cane and goatskin gloves passed by them and raised his broad-brimmed felt hat, and paused and came to them. His silk tie, his collar, his shirt, his enamelled links, his suit, his socks—all were different shades of blue.

"Do you know Captain Maddison?" she asked. "Billy, this is Mr. de la Hay."

"I've had the honour of meeting him already," said de la Hay in his rich voice.

"Oh, have you? I didn't know. How long are you stopping here, Mr. de la Hay?"

"Till the West End rehearsals, I expect, Mrs. Fairfax. I find this a charming place." He glanced at his immaculate trousers, at his patent leather shoes.

"Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks."

William lit his pipe carefully and got up. "I've just remembered an engagement. Will you excuse me if I rush off?"

"Of course, Billy. Will you be back to lunch?"

"Well, it is an engagement for lunch, and tea as well, I expect. Tennis, you know."

"Then I shall see you at dinner? Or shan't I?"

"Thanks very much. Good-bye."

"Good-bye—hope you have a good game."

They both smiled at him, and he went down to the beach with a Billjohn trotting at his heels too hot to explore the myriad smells that came to him. Tired of sitting by the sea, he climbed another cliff path and went round to the Normans' house. They were out,

with the exception of Mrs. Norman, who told him to come in, and asked him how he was getting on.

"How is it you aren't with your friends this morning, Willie?"

"Major Fairfax went back to-day, Mrs. Norman."

"Surely his wife didn't go with him?"

"No. She's still here."

"Are you going away soon?"

"I don't know, Mrs. Norman."

"Then the sooner you make up your mind to go, the better. That woman is not the slightest good to you, Willie, or to anyone else. I'm talking straight because it's for your good. The looker-on sees most of the game, you know. Besides, the husband is your friend, isn't he?"

"Can't I be friends with both of them?"

"You might want to be, but such things don't happen. A platonic friendship isn't feasible. One or the other spoils it, sooner or later. Take the advice of a woman of the world, Willie, and go away while there's time. Aren't you ever going to do any work?"

"It's very hard to get a job now-a-days, Mrs. Norman."

"Have you tried?"

"No."

"I thought not. I hope you aren't going to develop into an idler. But you were always a peculiar and indolent boy. Don't be offended at these home truths. Willie, do pull yourself together, or you'll be making a mess of your life."

"How do you know I've been doing nothing in Devon? Really, I have not been idling, unless you call thinking an idleness."

"You deceive yourself, Willie. That's a despicable excuse for laziness—thinking!"

"I am prepared to be despised," he said mournfully, clenching his hands. "I am quite used to that, ever since the days when I was thrashed because I couldn't force my wretched's child's head to do filthy and beastly schoolwork. Father used to threaten to break up my birds' eggs—my lovely relics of happiness and ecstasy—and now the world, I suppose, will do its best to destroy the thoughts that begin to rise, like a ghostly phoenix, from the ashes of those taintless days. You say I was indolent as a boy, you wise grownups, with your canes and your all-wise condemnation of the little boys' dreams and your money and snobbishness. One day the world will cease to grind away the natural, the childlike, the godlike part of the soul, but there will be a lot more bludgeoning first, many more Calvarys, many more Odes to the West Wind—and we only have about two visionaries in a century."

"Possibly. But you are not one. And, if you were, it would not alter the fact that Mrs. Fairfax is the wife of another man, and that man is supposed to be your friend, and that you've got to earn your own living, or starve."

"What's this about starving?" enquired the voice of Mr. Norman in the hall. "Who's starving? Our Willie. He certainly looks a bit thin. However, there's salmon and cutlets for lunch. What have you been doing with yourself all the time? We've been expecting you to come round at least once a week."

"He's been too taken up with other friends, of course. My dear Willie, if you know her origin, how you would be surprised!"

"Now, then, no secrets betrayed!" said Mr. Norman.

"Very well, I'll leave you to talk."

Left alone, Mr. Norman asked if anything were the matter.

"Nothing, Mr. Norman."

"You mustn't worry about what people say to you, Willie. A man must do what he thinks right. True education is a leading-out—the real meaning of the word—a leading-out of the falseness in one's nature. It takes time. Don't worry! Salmon and cutlets for lunch. Staying?"

"Thank you."

"We're going next week, you know."

He had lunch and tea with them, and allowed himself, with a curious feeling of apprehension, to be persuaded to remain to supper. Elsie and Charlie were partners in bridge against William and Mrs. Norman. William revoked nine times in two rubbers. At ten o'clock he went round to The Paragon, and walked upstairs.

"There was no light in the drawing room. In the kitchen he could hear the soft steaming of a kettle. Martha sat within, with folded arms, staring at the gas stove. She looked up wearily as he walked in.

"She's gone out, mister."

"Where to?"

"I don't know, mister. She expected you to lunch and tea, and a cover was laid for you at dinner, but you didn't come. She's been solitary all day, mister. I think she misses the master very much."

"Yes, I expect she does."

"Yes, mister. Would you like a cup of coffee?"

"No, thank you, Martha. I suppose you don't know where she's gone?"

"No, mister. She said she couldn't wait here any more, and went out."

"I'll go and find her, then."

"Yes, mister."

He went on the Leas, walking quickly and scanning in the light of the lamps the faces of the people he passed on foot and on the seats. He could not see her. The time came when every other lamp was switched out, and he was a mile past the bandstand. Thinking she might be on one of the lower walks he left the promenade and went along a parallel path a few yards below the top of the Leas. Seeing a dim figure coming slowly towards him he sat down on a seat and hid his face in his coat collar. It was a woman, and she went past slowly, but whether or no she looked at him he did not see; a man was following her. Stealthily he passed the seat, overtaking her some distance away. William listened. He heard the footsteps stop, and a man's voice saying, "Good-evening. What are you doing all by yourself, little girl, and so late at night?"

The man continued, in a slightly altered voice—"Surely I met you on the beach this morning?"—and Eveline's calm reply: "Do you mind going away?"

"I say, don't get huffy. A chap can mistake a lady, can't he?"

"Yes, but I never mistake a gentleman," she icily replied, walking towards William.

"Is that you, Bill?"

"Yes," he said, jumping up. The man slipped away.

"Where have you been, Billy?"

"I've been looking for you. Who's that man?"

"Some bounder from London, I expect. Have you been home?"

"Yes."

"Did Martha tell you I was out?"

"Yes. I came to find you."

"That's very kind of you. I didn't know I had such a friend."

"I went away this morning because I don't like your pal, that's all."

"That's rather a habit of yours, isn't it, my dear? It has its cause in snobbish conceit."

They went up to the promenade, and strolled in the direction of home, speaking seldom. The iron bands of suffering tightened round his chest. Outside the flat he said good-night, but did not go away; and she said,

"Good-night."

"Good-bye, Eveline."

Some singing soldiers passed, arm-in-arm, walking back to Quorncliffe Camp. When they had gone she said casually,

"I had a wire from Peter White to-day, and I rather wanted to ask your advice about him. But if you would rather not——"

"You know I'd do anything in the world to help you, Eve."

"You have a funny way of showing your devotion. But you're of such fine tissue, I suppose, that my coarse nature upsets you. You ought to have been a woman, Billy, and I ought to have been a man. You would be a nun."

"That's a cruel thing to say, Eve."

"I didn't mean it as such. But you constantly take my remarks in a manner different from what I intend."

"It often seems to me that you delight in hurting people."

"Only those I love."

"And your love is like the chafing sea." And, wistfully, he added: "But I love you just the same."

"You mustn't say that any more, Lord Tornsox."

"Very well. I'll go now—good-night, Eveline."

"Won't you come in a moment for a cigarette?"

"Are you sure I shan't be in the way?"

"Don't talk in that unnatural manner. Be your own dear self, Billy. You can be an angel."

Martha gave them coffee, and Eveline said, "You poor dear, have you been waiting up for me? Go to bed, Marty."

They sipped the coffee and smoked cigarettes. Motor cars passed outside, and then the big lamp at the cross-streets was extinguished by a man with a long stick. Only one shaded reading lamp illumined the room.

"I'll show you the telegram," she said, rising to get it. When he had read it, and re-read it, William asked her who was meant by Mignon.

"That is supposed to be me."

"A term of affection?"

"I suppose so. Surely you know it is a French word, meaning Darling? Where were you brought up?"

"He is in love with you, Eve—like everyone else."

"In his boyish way, I suppose he is. I can't help it."

He gave her the telegram, and Eveline said,

"I suppose he'll be hanging about for six days. I don't want to see him. I don't want to receive his wild letters, or his poems, or to read the books he sends me—and I don't, on my soul and honour, want to be unkind. What can a woman do? Tell me, Billy."

"It seems to be rather a question of what—people—should not do."

"You've said it exactly. You're very wise sometimes, my friend."

The coffee finished, and three cigarettes, he rose to go.

"Don't make a noise going down, will you?"

"I'm going back to Devon in three days."

"Why?" she asked, and he saw what he imagined to be a look of fear in her eyes.

He did not reply to her question, but walked to the window and stared at the dimmed street below. She said,

"Have you been with the Normans to-day?"

"Yes."

"I see."

"You remember what you asked me this morning, when I came back from the station?"

She leapt up, and looked straight into his face.

"Have you been talking about me to anyone?"

"No."

"Oh, I could smite you dead! You have been discussing me! I can see it in your face. I also saw you with Mary this afternoon. Very well, go back to Devon with her."

He repeated that he would go back to his hermitage, but as he spoke his heart was filled with an unbearable pain.

"Then go, with my blessing. Good-night, Brown-eyes."

She stretched her arms above her head, bending backwards, rising to her toes with an exquisite flexion. The arms came down slowly on his shoulders, and she rested her head on his coat, as though she were weary. He stood still, thinking of Lionel. With arms wound round him she confessed that never before had she felt such a piercing jealousy. He turned away, having an intense desire to rest his head on her bosom, and

to be cherished. She was saying, "Billy, I can't live without you, I can't really. I knew it to-day. Don't be cold, Billy. You are more than life to me. You don't care about Mary, do you? I could have killed her when I saw you talking on the beach this afternoon, with your head so close to hers. Put your arms round me, Billy. You wild bird, you have caged your mistress. Billy, speak to me."

In the dark his voice murmured fearfully that he must go. She clung to him, and he enfolded her in his arms, but he did not kiss her. They stood thus for a minute, while he hesitated, beginning to soften with passion. He waited to be kissed again, but quietly she drew away from him and went out of the room. He heard the quiet closing of her bedroom door. Till three o'clock he was pacing swiftly the Leas, alone with the spaniel and the cool night wind that flowed tirelessly from the hills

CHAPTER XII

THE PATHETIC KNIGHT

ONE afternoon they motored to the Rhythe military canal, five miles from Findlestone, and by the flat marshy coast where was the headquarters of a School of Musketry, and the deserted hutments and concrete hangars of an aerodrome. Hiring a skiff, he sculled her up the canal. She sat in the stern holding the rudder lines, once waving her hand to a party of blue-suited hospital soldiers sitting on the towpath who whistled and shouted remarks to them.

"You're all right, mate."

"She's a pretty little girl from nowhere, nowhere at all," chanted one.

Another sang with lung-gassy wheeziness, *"All-day long he—call-all-ed her, snooky-ookums."*

"That's a boatload fit for a hero," remarked a wag with half his face shot away.

"Company, eyes front!" ordered another, presenting arms with a crutch.

She was called *Lizzie, Lil, Mademoiselle from Armentières, My beautiful ba-byee doll,* and other names.

"I love them all," she said as he pulled through the weedbeds. "My heart goes out to them. I wish I could be everything to all men. You understand the feeling, don't you, Billy?"

He nodded, and continued to scull in the hot sun-

shine. Eventually they made fast the painter to a willow tree, and stepped on to the greensward. All the afternoon they sat under a willow, while with a yellow wand, a thread of cotton, and a bent pin baited with a bread pill he tried to catch the red-finned roach that passed above the submerged weed forests. She took off shoes and stockings, and with cotton skirt tucked up dabbled her toes in the coolth of the water. The ripples threw a soft light on her face, shaded by a large hat, making more lovely the glances she gave him. A pair of royal swans with three dun cygnets in their wake bore down upon them, and hove up, stately accepting the pieces of bread Eveline tossed to them. Then with uncovered feet they walked down the tow-path, taking the kettle and the teabasket, and explored the desolate aerodrome. They visited the officers' hutments now empty and littered with paper, wondering how fared the vanished inhabitants; what airman had drawn the charcoal sketches on the asbestos sheeting of the walls: what man had pasted up the coloured drawings and photogravures of actresses and Society beauties from *The Sketch*, *The Tatler*, and *The Bystander*. Contemplation of these dusty relics of a scattered generation made them silent as they wandered from hollow grey cubicle to hollow grey cubicle, and down the empty corridors, where hung scarlet fire-buckets and cobwebs. On the hot asphalt of the paths from one hut to another they ran, on their toes because of the heat, making a tour of these quiet places. They had tea in one of the lofty mechanics' sheds, once filled by the sickly mist of castor oil, by the haar and roar of tested rotary engines. Now it was a place of mice and moths and dried oilpatches, with green sorrel growing unsunned amid rotted paper by the concrete walls.

They saw a bird rustling through the grass in the shed. She caught it. It struggled, its heart throbbed, its beak gaped. It was a lark with a trailing wing, broken by the claw-stroke of a hawk. Tears rolled down her cheeks; it was so frail and thin and weak and helpless. His heart spilled over, and he embraced her, smoothing her cheek, stirred to the core of his being by her woman's tenderness. She leaned against him, holding the bird in her hands. The shoulder joint was festered. It fell off. The bird fluttered one ragged wing. He trod out the life of the earth-fallen singer.

"How could you, Billy?"

"Nothing is lost in earth or air."

"I suppose it was best."

"Never will I forget your angel's pity, dear, dear, gentle Eve." He kissed her hands, trembling, while she waited. He would not look at her.

"You torture me, Billy. But, of course, you are a poet, and care more for the angelic idea of me than for the unangelic Eveline? Funny William, so serious about life! The abstract is very uncomfortable, my dear. It eases no passion. But perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps your passion is wasted in dreams? Don't look so sad, Billy, dear."

She rose from her knees and kissed him on the mouth, but sprang up as he remained apparently apathetic: but when she was outside he lay down where she had been sitting, pressing his cheek on the cushion. She can probe into the very hearts of men, he sighed.

Swiftly the long golden days perished. They went riding together, William having sent to Rookhurst for his kit. She said that he looked very distinguished breeched and booted and spurred; she tied and arranged with deft feminine fingertouches his white

stock. She rode a black thoroughbred borrowed from Mr. Archibald Dodder, and the old gentleman would wave aside the groom, himself adjusting girths and stirrup leathers, seeing that cheekstrap and curbchain were not too tight, and throwing her up into the saddle. They cantered on the downs with only crows and hawks for company, cracking hunting whips, once startling a lean hare from its daydream and pretending to hunt it with a phantom pack of harriers, while from their carrion feasts the daws and pies rose raving at the thud of galloping hoofs. On being told of the fun, Jonquil begged to accompany them next time, and she rode between them, a blue-velvet-capped-and-brown-leather-gaitered sprite upon a Shetland pony. Eveline rode astride, tall and boyish in black riding boots, nigger-brown breeches and waisted coat, and gold-pinned stock so silk-soft under her chin. Purposely he lagged behind to watch the lovely centaurean grace of mother and daughter, which put into his heart wild pangs and longings.

But usually they went without her, riding to an ancient downland thorn in whose scanty shade they left their horses. The bark of the hard branches was pared by the teeth of the animals tethered so long, and she told him that misfortune would come to them for bringing this hurt to the tree. It was an old saying in the village where she was born, she said, that thorns must never be injured or even climbed, otherwise they would bring disaster. She embraced its old twisted trunk, laying her cheek against the wood, as though silently beseeching the wood spirit to stay its wrath. He was so moved by her beauty that he put his arms about her and the thorn, pinning her against it, and saying that if he had the power he would shut her up

within it, so that he could build himself a stone hut and forever have her nigh him, sharing her only with perching magpies and crows. She complained that he hurt her, and although he would comfort her she seemed not to realize that he was there, and turned her face to the tree. Nor would she tell afterwards what silent words her heart had spoken to it, but seemed vaguely to resent the questions.

Once they sat by the grassy barrows secreting chalk and bone while he picked up rough flints, wondering whether any wild man had held them in his hand, and to throw them down when his mind saw no arrowheads in them. The flints were there, unworn by the elements: the skull of the hunter was calcined dust under the turf: but where was the mind that had filled it? Her thought was not in the past; and once she explained why a woman's dreams were not like a man's. She told him that while his old ancestor had sat hunched on those hills, wondering on that beyond the sealine, her old ancestress had been rubbing dried sticks to make fire and to roast the wood-dog in whose shaggy hide the hunter had driven his spear. The man hunted, and then was free to wonder; the woman's drudge went on all the time. And after many summers a man might be born who would soon tire of hunting, but never tire of wondering; and one day as he listened to the wind in the brook-reeds he cut some and bound them together to blow upon and make sweet sounds. Or he would scratch with a flint upon the soft seashore stones the head of a woman, or, if he were mated and a father, the head of the wood-dog. After a while he would do these for other men, bartering them for deer or dog; and perhaps play his reeds at night, and they would bring him roasted joints; but

always the women had to drudge with no time to wonder about the sea and the stars, to bear children and have no energy for dream.

The strange hot tide of summer lapsed slowly from the songless land. Never had there been such a harvest of corn and stoneless fruit, but the root crops were stringy and ruined. Still no rain clouds came to the sky; the swallows gathered, disappearing suddenly, weeks before their time; rare butterflies danced on the downs—Painted Ladies, Swallow Tails, Camberwell Beauties. Mr. Everard Dodder, an enthusiastic entomologist, vowed that he had seen a Large Copper. Eveline asked him what they would say at the Police Station if he put it in a killing bottle, but no reply was given. He did not approve of herself, she told William, and hadn't the wit to see any jokes.

The leaves of the trees fell early, uncoloured, withered, nerveless. The hard blue sky pulsed with heat.

Sometimes he wandered by himself; because Eveline had engagements with her friends. Days passed without him seeing her. Mr. Tollemache went riding with her, and took her out in a racing motor-boat he had managed to borrow. There were days when she was cold and hostile to him; he tried to determine why she was so different from his companion on the Corpsnout or by St. Flammea's well. He refused to accept the obvious, the commonplace explanation. He still exalted her. He was nearly distracted with jealousy of the men who came to take her to golf at Rythe, or on the canal, or to motor her to the cathedral town of Canterbury. No idea of distrust came to him; but the iron bands of suffering were riveted tighter. He ate very little, and pride prevented him from eating any more meals at her house. He and Jonquil were to be

seen together on the beach, or by the duck pond in Rador Park, sometimes with old Martha; the man and the child were the greatest friends. At times the joyousness of Jonquil quenched the smoulder of pain, and forgetting to think, he joyed with her—perhaps in the sailing of paper boats on the pond, when the leaves and weed on the water became the great Sargasso Sea, the ducks were coiling sea-serpents; the saturated papers became Spanish galleons with cannon and tarnished gilt figurehead and perhaps a white-bearded ragged maniac pacing in rags the rotten deck. Himself and Quillie, of course, were in a boat that could cut through the weeds; they were exploring.

On other occasions he talked to Jonquil as though she were his own size; he talked naturally and simply, and the small girl understood, frequently declaring that she would marry him when he grew up, and make him happy by loving him all day and singing to him all night, and telling him adventure stories, but at present, she said, "Quillie's head had them buzzin an hoppin about, but they won't come out properly, so you'll have to wait, don't you see, Willum."

Left alone on some evenings he went round to the aunts, where he had to endure stoically the barked comments of Mr. Fairfax about British Israel and the relapsing of the world into the Dark Ages, intermingled with groans about Gloria the maid's extravagance with the coal in the kitchen, and the price of food, until the old gentleman was rendered ineffectual by the isolation of bedclothes. Twice the aunts were his guests at Corvano's and the play: steadily his money drained away. One evening Eveline in a mood of impulsive contrition took him with her to visit Mr. Archibald Dodder, whom she declared to be a particular friend

of hers, and that old gentleman, puffing into his brown stocktie, gave them his precious Martinez '04 vintage port to drink, and hundred-year old brandy. He was delighted to take them to the Leas Pavilion to see the concert party, chuckling at the jokes and repeating them to Eveline vivacious by his side. His tall pale brother, Mr. Everard Dodder, the wearer of a monocle and white spats, he told them, was the most terrible bore in existence, always innocently enjoying himself: he was Chairman of the Findlestone Vigilance Society. Old Archie Dodder snorted his contempt of him, telling them that he had the mind of a maggot, bah, yes!

Everyone in Findlestone seemed to be spending money, to be dancing. Young demobilized officers lived at the hotels, enjoying the fruits of war, or rather the windfalls come to them upon discharge from H. M. Forces—their gratuities. William's seventy pounds became ten; for those meals he had at the flat he insisted on paying into her bank two guineas a week towards her housekeeping expenses. She made no mention of it after a preliminary protest. And one morning, unable to bear the pain of neglect further, he said that he was going away. She came and sat by him, taking his head upon her bosom; wildly he implored her to link her life with his; openly, for her own sake; he said that he believed there was some money for him left by his dead mother, and he could get it from his father. It would be sufficient, he believed, for them to live upon quietly in a Devon cottage with perhaps a pony and trap. He begged her to take the final step and join her life with his; she said that she would lose her darling Quillie, that she could not bear to hurt Lionel. Ah, well, he sighed, and went to the station to ascertain the time of trains to Rookhurst, and on

going back to the flat he found that Captain Patrick Collyer was seated in an armchair, his feet upon the rungs of a smaller one drawn up, an Egyptian cigarette between his lips, and a tumbler of whiskey-and-soda on the floor by his side.

PART III

THE BROKEN WEB

*"Save his own soul he hath nō star."
Swinburne.*

CHAPTER I

DREAM TRYST

HE asked William casually if he knew where Mrs. Fairfax was.

“I think she’s gone round to her grandfather’s.”

He remained seated. He sipped his drink. William regarded the ribbons on the breast of his azure tunic—the red and blue of the Distinguished Service Order, with two dull silver rosettes, the purple and white of the Military Cross, the purple and white lines of the Distinguished Flying Cross, the red, white and blue of the 1915 star, the watered rainbow of the Victory Medal, the blue and yellow of the General Service Medal, the red-striped green of the *Croix de Guerre avec palme*, the red of the *Legion d’honneur*, and five or six foreign decorations of which he did not know the name.

“I wish you wouldn’t stare at me,” exclaimed Captain Collyer fretfully.

“I’m awfully sorry—I was admiring your decorations.”

“Then I wish you wouldn’t—it’s like being at a restaurant.”

“You don’t mind my being in the room, I suppose?”

“I don’t mind what you do, so long as you don’t stare at me, or expect me to have conversation with you.”

“I don’t think you could have conversation with anyone. You’d merely drawl remarks.”

Captain Collyer looked sideways out of the window, finished his drink, and languidly poured himself another.

"Has Mrs. Fairfax seen you yet?" asked William, in a hard voice.

Captain Collyer yawned and drawled. "Do you think I'd stroll in and treat her house as an hotel, or a club? Why do you ask? Have you a share in it?"

"Only a cad would say that."

"You are entirely mistaken, and your mistake arises from an ignorance of the ways of gentlemen. Obviously."

"If you aren't careful, Collyer, I shall pitch you outside."

"That remark rather illustrates what I have just said. You know I am practically a cripple."

"I didn't know. I beg your pardon."

"You are forgiven, owing to your ignorance. Have you been for a walk?"

"Yes. I——"

"Have I interrupted it?"

"I don't understand, Collyer."

"I mean—are you going on with your walk?"

"Oh, no."

"Then you don't mind if I go on with my sleep, do you? I am rather fatigued."

He finished the drink, put the tumbler on the writing desk, and stretching his long legs on the chair, closed his eyes, sighed, and lay still.

William went round to Radnor Park Gardens, and was told by Aunt Milly that Eveline had just left to go to the town. She would take that opportunity, she said, of giving him a friendly talking-to.

It appeared that Lina had recently met a widowed

lady, a friend of theirs who should be unnamed, who had shocked and surprised Lina by telling her that she ought to remember that as a married woman, and with a husband abroad, she really could not be too careful. Lina was so rash and foolhardy, and was so hurt because she feared that she was being talked about in Findlestone. Of course, people always talked, especially in seaside towns! Apparently Lina's innocent gaiety had been mistaken by the harsh minds of this world. Nevertheless, when there was smoke there was fire, and she, Milly, as Lina's pal and *confidante*, felt that it was an obligation to her niece and confiding pal, as well as her duty to her absent nephew, the son of her poor dead brother, to drop a hint to dear old guileless Billy, just as she had dropped a hint to his sweet cousin Phèa some months back, to consider Lina's reputation as a married gel and a mother. He must not be offended if she suggested that he went away for a time, and it would increase the respect for him of someone-she-knew-who-should-be-nameless (with a laughing fingershake) if that someone heard that he was working hard, determining to make a position! He looked on the ground as though in deep contemplation of her words, thanked her, and went away hurriedly, in the direction of the town.

After an hour's search he went back to the flat, walking up slowly owing to the heat, and because he felt a weariness. The rubbers on his shoes made little noise, and he went into the kitchen to ask Martha if she had returned. Hardly had he entered when Eveline strode across the hall and in a cold voice requested him to go out of the servant's hall, and to speak to her in the dining room. He held open the door of that room for her, and closed it, facing her.

"I never thought you could be so contemptible as to spy," she began, but he interrupted her by asking her why she had not told him that she was expecting a visitor.

"That is an impertinent question," she said, "and even if it were not, you have not the slightest right to ask it. I am not your property, remember."

"Eve, why are you so changed? I was not spying. I came up slowly because I was tired," he assured her.

"You have many words, and, with them, an excuse for everything. And as a guest in my house, what right have you to insult any friends that I choose to invite here?"

"None whatever."

"Then why did you glare at Pat, and threaten to throw him out?"

"I admit I lost my temper. What else could a man do, when he is sneered at as I was? Have you no care for me, that you treat me like this?"

"Very little indeed. This last month since Lionel left you have been unbearable. You don't want me yourself, yet you follow me like a shadow, babbling about the purification of mankind by association in childhood with birds and weeds and wind, and other unintelligible weariness. Jonquil may be charmed by such dreams, my dear Billy, but for one whose mind is mature and healthy, they seemed pallid and—forgive me saying it—even degenerate."

He stared at her, and said as he turned away his head,—

"Had you ever loved me, you would never have said—what you—said just now."

Eveline replied. "Do you mind going?"

He did not move. Her words seemed to make the

world recede from his feet, leaving him in a void of uttermost darkness.

"Eve, Eve, don't let us part like this. Say one kind word to lighten the darkness that has fallen on the radiant thing which was our love."

"You are keeping me from my friend."

He seized her hand and pleaded, "Don't—don't—your words are like arrows in my heart."

She said in a curt, expressionless voice,

"I should have thought by the way you continue to remain here that your skin was too thick for my pointed remarks to be taken in. Will you please go?"

He looked at her with proud humility.

"If I were less desperate I think I would kill myself, but no—," he stopped, and as she pulled away her hand he said despondently, "If I were dead, then never—never—never—could I make you understand that I feel about you as I think God feels about the earth which my—feet tread, as something—strayed from the Light."

"Words, words, words."

He faltered on in distress, "That is why the Light-bringers come among men—Eve—Eve——"

She turned away and pulled open the door. She waited in the hall, tapping the barometer. He went out of the room and through the hall door, turning to whisper,

"Farewell."

"Good-bye, Billy," she said, closing the door. She gave him a sweet glance as he looked up at the turn of the stairs; he saw, and her eyes became sad. He was frenzied by doubt immediately. She went back to Captain Collyer, and he went down the stairs and wandered about the Leas, trying to understand what

had happened. I know her true nature is pure and steadfast, he told himself a hundred agonizing times. She loves me, and is punishing me because I show no love to her. She was made to be loved, and I have been wrong and foolish in not writing to Lionel. This can't go on. It is wrong to withhold oneself if one loves and is loved. A blasphemy against the Great Spirit! Perhaps Collyer——

He groaned, and dared not to think it. He walked the Leas for hours, seeing her after tea by the bandstand with Jonquil and Captain Collyer, but she was too far away to notice him, and he tried to read his worn copy of *The Story of My Heart* constantly turning to the engraving of Richard Jefferies opposite the title page, his only companion. He observed the figure of Peter White in the distance hurrying along but he avoided him by going down to the sea.

As he sat on the brown pebbles one of those moods that come to all men and women came to him—the acute consciousness of the terrible loneliness of life. His spirit had been broken-in upon by its complement spirit, which had given rest and strength and joy to it: the old scar of the pre-Adam join had been opened, but now the penetrating spirit was torn away, leaving a wound.

Once when he was a child William was going to be thrashed for destroying jay-traps in a wood, and nearly diswitted by terror he ran away from home for three days. At intervals ever since that time, when the world he knew rolled upon the motherless boy, he had longed, often poignantly, for love—visualized in adolescence and early youth as something bright which caused him to be protected and clasped in darkness. He had found his spirit's consoler, and lost her again.

Now the brightness was gone. He tried to break the pebbles gripped in his hands; his desire for love was uncrushable like the pebbles. Till midnight he walked the path by the sea, feeling neither thirst nor hunger, hoping to meet her companionless and remorseful. She did not come. He went to his lodging, undressed, and got into bed, but he did not sleep. His mind began its nightly battle with reality.

During the day reality won, but in the darkness dream, which could take him to regions beyond mortal grieving, conquered for awhile. His passionate adoration was for the vision of Eveline he had worshipped, when first he had met her; night after night he had tossed and turned, grieving because she appeared to be different from the Eve he had known in Devon, and in his mind unable to understand why. Night after night of sapped vitality, leaving him pale and languid for the day, and the pain it brought. But the nights were for him with their solace of dream.

Only a sheet covered him, yet his body was as fiery as his brain. The bed was a wide one, and throughout the hours he shifted from one cold side to another, only to make it hot, especially where his head lay on the pillows. These he dropped on the floor, laying his head on the dry straw bolster, which gave no relief. Every thought was of Eveline in Devon, of her mirthful eyes and sanguine lips, tender for himself. His mind retraced the flagstones to her house, up the steps, passed through the locked door, and drifted wraithlike into her room. Pain dragged it forth from her dark chamber. To other places it went with her, with an Eveline now freed and joyous: to meadows with celandines, the flowers of hope, telling that spring was coming, with its sweet birdsong in the very air. Hazel wands and ash-

poles, home of the willow wrens, pollen dusting the red nut flowers, doves fluttering above at their raft-like nests, the windflowers below. Green corn asway, and sighing, swallows under the meadow oaks, whitethroats slipping through the nettles: everything come again, brought by the faithful English spring. All this loveliness shaping itself into one thing, and, seeing, he drew up his knees, as though to hug to himself the vision. She who saw the same vision was with him, and in a passionate adoration he clasped her feet, kissing them, wrapping his arms round her knees, till his body was merged into hers, his spirit commingled and absorbed, floating in the blue-stained air, dissolved where was no time, where meadow and tree hung a-dream, where blossom was one with root and leaf, where song and colour and scent became a quivering radiance of whitest light. With a wrenching of the mind he was dragged away from his prostration before the godhead of perfection, of pure love, to be forced to realize that it would never be. He beat away the batwings of imagination, but return they would; he buried his head in the mattress, pressing his eyes, but still they persisted. He clasped the cold bedrails, and, kneeling, leaned his bare chest against the top bar.

The house was quiet, with a deadness that bore upon him like onrushing oblivion. He went to the window, standing on cold oilcloth. A flagpost in the squalid backyard was black in the sky; the cord tapping against the wood. Here he could remain no longer.

Lighting his candle, he dressed, and tiptoed down the stairs. Closing carefully the door, he walked up the silent and deserted street to Radnor Park Gardens. No lights shone in the houses; everywhere was sombrous thickness through which loomed the buildings.

He prowled round the square several times, longing to speak to a human creature, and sometimes kneeling down and embracing Billjohn, and wishing him to understand. Always the same was the spaniel; humbly affectionate and happy, returning immediately at the god's low whistle that was like the call of a curlew.

He passed the flat, quiet like all others. The darkness was like the ghost of a grey fungus trying to grow upon him. He lit a cigarette, but it was tasteless, so he threw it against a garden wall, on which it showered red sparks. Down The Paragon he walked, across the High Street, and so to the Leas. Faster and faster, till the pathway was reached to the sea. Dropping down the lower promenade, he jumped on the shingle, lifting down the dog to him. By the edge of the sea he sat down, looking across the Channel waters to the lighthouse of Gris Nez. Spray from the battering waves wetted his face, and the pebbles abraded in the backwash roared a million watery protests. He took off his clothes, and stepped into the sea, bracing himself to meet a big wave. It swept over him, leaving him upon the pebbles. He dived through the next roller and swam beyond the crest where it was calm. On his side he struck out for the open sea, in the direction of the French coast. Stars slid in silver streaks up the passing swell of the black water. Half a mile from the land he ceased to swim, and floated on his back, while the waves lifted him gently, and the black bubble-rush murmured past his ears. With slow strokes he returned to the distressed dog, often rolled under the surge. He crawled on the pebbles to lie glimmering in the starlight, beside the spaniel licking his cold face, feeling that death was very near in the darkness, tender and compassionate, and ready to bear him away to the after-sleeping.

CHAPTER II

DEPARTURE OF CAPTAIN COLLYER

IT was afternoon when he went back to the flat, an afternoon of sunshine and gay voices in the street, but not for him. Jonquil was outside, waiting for Martha to take her for a walk, and she was amusing herself by feeding a flock of sparrows with crumbs. She gave him a sidelong smile in greeting, and continued her talk with the birds.

A man in a bowler hat and a drab suit came round the corner from the direction of Radnor Park Gardens as he went up the stone steps. The man looked at him keenly as he went past. Another man in a bowler hat and a drab suit came down The Paragon from the direction of the Leas, on the other side of the road. When nearly opposite to the building wherein Eveline lived he stopped, and the first man turned back, joined him and stopped outside the house. Wondering aimlessly why they wore such hats in the hot weather, he went up to the flat. The men followed. Eveline met them in the hall.

“Are you Mrs. Fairfax, ma’am?” said one of the men.

“I am. Who are you?”

“Is there anyone named Captain Collyer with you, please?”

“Yes.”

“May I see him, please?”

“If it is a question of a mistake in giving a cheque, I am prepared to settle that immediately. Captain Collyer told me this morning that he wasn’t sure——”

“Just so. Perhaps the gentleman would oblige by coming here a minute.”

“You’d better come in and see him. Wait in there, will you please? Hullo, Billy, why haven’t you been round before? Pat, you’re wanted in the next room.”

Captain Collyer lounged against the chimneypiece, a cigarette in his hand. The man waited in the hall. Captain Collyer drew smoke, repeatedly, from his cigarette. Then he walked languidly to the door, and said,

“Good afternoon. Do you want me?”

“If you wouldn’t mind stepping in the next room a minute. We are from the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard, and want to ask you a few questions.”

“My dear fellow, come in this room,” he drawled; and the door was shut behind him in the dining room.

Eveline went to her desk, and pulled papers about till she found something she had been looking for. It was a cheque-book. As she did not speak, William sat by the open window and watched the sea above the narrow opening of the street leading to the Leas. About half a minute later the dining room door opened and Captain Collyer’s voice, earnestly persuasive, was heard saying,

“ . . . my dear fellow, I tell you I have not just come from Harrogate. My car was stolen four days ago; and the fellow must have driven it there and sold it to the garage.”

“You can tell that to the Inspector—and to Captain Collyer!”

“My dear fellow, *I* am Captain Collyer. Honestly I am. Air-mechanic Shiggles, the fellow you’re after, is my servant—or was, until he cleared off with most of my kit. So he’s taken to using my name as well, has he?”

“You can explain that at the station. Now, come along before we fetch you.”

“My dear fellow, you’re making an awful fool of yourself. And, remember, you can’t arrest an officer in uniform.”

They were standing in the hall. Eveline looked at William.

“Brown, go and get the A. P. M.,” ordered one of the men; the door was pushed open, and Captain Collyer came in, followed by the man.

“Awful sorry, Lina,” he said in his languid tones, “most awful bore for you. That scamp Shiggles would think of masquerading as his officer. However, it will be all right.”

They waited about ten minutes, and Eveline, laughing once again, asked Martha to bring in some tea. The detective thanked her, but refused to have any.

They finished tea, while Captain Collyer lounged by the grate, one hand behind him. Then someone was heard to be coming upstairs, and a cultured but rough voice said:

“Where is he? Wait there, sa’nt.”

“Very good, sir.”

A short fat man came into the room in white flannels, over which he wore the khaki tunic of a major, with a red brassard marked in black letters APM.

“How d’ye do, Mrs. Fairfax?” he panted. “Sorry this should have occurred in your house. Playing a game of tennis. Should have been informed of this.”

"A memorandum was delivered at your office at 10 a.m., this morning, sir," explained the C.I.D. man.

"Was it, was it? Well, is this the impostor? I put you under arrest," he puffed, wiping his brow.

"Major Cornwallis, I'm sure there's some mistake," protested Eveline. "I've known Captain Collyer for a long time."

"He's been a deserter since Armistice Day," replied the detective grimly, "and his other names at Bournemouth, Torquay, Brighton, and Eastbourne are Compton McCudden and Perceval Capel, both with those ribbons and the rank of Captain."

"Awful sorry you should be worried, Lina," said Captain Collyer. "I suppose I'd better go. Of course, I'll come back shortly. It's rather fortunate that my father is a director of the Northcliffe Press, because everything can be given proper publicity, even an account of my arrest by an Assistant Provost Marshal in tennis flannels—damned dirty ones, too!"

"You impertinent scoundrel," panted Major Cornwallis. "Take off those orders." He went to Captain Collyer, and tore off his ribbons.

"Well, I couldn't tear off yours with such a noise, could I?" enclamed the prisoner, eyeing the lonely and insignificant bit of colour on the A. P. M.'s breast.

"Hold your tongue, sir!" bellowed the A. P. M.

"Oh, very well, sir," drawled the other, "very well. It will not be myself who will be cashiered, sir. Do you mind calling a cab? I'm entitled to one, you know. What? Haven't you read King's Regulations? Au revoir, Lina; and my regrets for this unfortunate exhibition of ill-breeding and unsoldierly conduct on the part of Major Cornwallis. Don't trouble to come to the station, sir," speaking with a cold sneer to the A. P.

M. "Why not return to your game of tennis? But mind they don't mistake you for the ball! Personally I should think a turkish bath would get off those rolls of fat quicker."

Eveline was staring at the speaker with amazement. The suave manner, the tired drawl, the impassive languor, all these were gone. He spoke his sarcasms quickly, in a voice that held a suggestion of cockney coarseness.

"One moment, sir," said the plain-clothes man. "May I see his left hand? There should be a finger missing. Yes, I thought so."

"Probably done to avoid service!" panted Major Cornwallis, who wore, William noticed, no war chevrons, and no ribbons except the blue and red of the Coronation Medal.

"That," said the prisoner, scornfully, holding up his hand, "was shot off by the Calvary-Captain Baron von Richthofen. There's been a war, you know, and some of us have got hurt. And some of us have got fat!" he jeered at the A.P.M.

Long after all were departed Eveline stood by the window, looking at the narrow strip of sea beyond the promenade. Quietly William sat down, waiting for her to speak. She stood so still and for so long that he grew restless, and went out to see Martha. The servant did not seem inclined to speak to him after her one remark—"He was always a perfect gentleman to me, mister, and more I can't never say of no one"—so he went back.

"Billy."

"Yes, Eve."

"You didn't tell them he was here, did you?"

"No."

“On your honour?”

“On my honour—such as it is.”

“He need not have lied to me,” she said slowly: “I often wondered. Once, when Lord Spreycombe was here, he asked him something about Eton, and when Pat seemed flustered and avoided the question, I doubted. No, there was no need for him to lie to me. I knew he was hard up. I would have given him all I could spare just the same. Why didn’t he trust me? You see,” she added, looking him straight in the eyes, “I keep no friends.”

She spoke forlornly, lowering the glance of her eyes, spoke with a gesture of heaviness. Sinking on the couch, she added,

“I begin now to realize the worth and truth of that injured man—my husband.”

At her words he walked up and down the room, while she lay with her face on her arm in an unhappy attitude. For some minutes he paced restlessly, then went into the dining room, looking at the pictures on the walls, at the photographs, at the water-colour paintings. A giddiness as though of labour too long-continued came over him, and he sat down, resting his head on hands supported by his knees. Somewhere a clock chimed six times, but he did not move. The minutes wasted. A step sounded by him, a hand caressed his hair. He remained unmoving.

“Look up, old fellow,” she said; “I’m sorry I was so beastly to you.”

He stood on his feet, facing her.

“Eve, Eve—” was all he could falter for a minute. The upward look in her eyes was steady and grave. He wanted to kneel at her feet, to say that he could live unloved no longer. When he could speak steadily

again he tried to conceal by a half-playful manner the desolation of his thoughts. "Why, you dear old silly, you will never find happiness your way—you will break your own heart." She said, examining the top round leather button of his coat, and biting it gently with her teeth,

"I shan't break yours, that's a sure thing, for you haven't got one."

She laid her head sideways against his coat, as though to hear his heart beating. He pressed it there with his hands, stammering,

"Won't you trust me, Eve? Won't you trust me? I will be faithful for ever."

"But you don't trust me."

"Yes, yes, I do."

Her arms found a way under his coat and held him.

"Ah, but you are wild and untamable, and in my longing I hated you, and shot my spiteful arrows at your faithful heart. You have no shield against me, have you, little W-Willum?"

He shook his head, not daring to tell her how he longed to grovel before her, to surrender himself to her love-will. She became remorseful, and hugged him closer. On the wall in front of him was a photographic enlargement of Lionel. His happiness drained away as he stared at it, leaving in his unshielded heart strange barbs of pain.

CHAPTER III

DOLOR DECRESCIT

AFTER supper they sat by the open window as twilight stole up the street and dissolved the harsh fronts of the houses. They held hands, but did not speak. The street lamps winked brighter, and shadows were thrown by the big light over the crossroads. Martha had finished washing up, and sat with arms folded in the kitchen on a wooden chair. Jonquil was in bed and sleeping.

Eveline gently withdrew her hand from his listless clasps, and stood up, saying in a quiet voice that she was going for a walk down by the sea. He stood up and walked to the door, opening it for her. She passed out with a murmur of thanks and went into her room to get a fur coat, for the early autumn evening was chilly. He waited outside in the hall, leaning against the wall and immediately falling into a reverie; and when he heard her voice calling his name, he started up and said,

“Hullo?”

“Come here a minute, Billy.”

He pushed the door open and stepped inside. The room was in darkness, except for the wefted lights of streetlamps on the ceiling. She was standing still by the wardrobe. He looked at her.

“Come here, Billy.”

The seductive tone of her command made his heart beat quicker, and his mouth became dry. He went to her, where she stood with her fur coat thrown open and the fragrance of an eastern scent seeming to steal upon him like the whispered breath of desire. He touched her cheek with the back of his fingers, and smoothed her eyebrows; he stroked her hair and made the tips of fingers and thumbs meet round her neck, but the contact was light.

"Well, Eve, what do you want me for?" he said with mouth nearly closed, and taking his hands from her neck.

"Be the darling Billy you were in Devon," she murmured.

He bent his trembling knees so that their faces almost touched, and his eyes were level with hers. In the dimness her features were immobile and marble-chaste—the brow made whiter by the dark hair above it, the large eyes with their black lashes, the lips that she moistened as he held her face in his hands and tilted her head.

"Are you going to marry me?" he asked; "if you say yes, I will kiss your sanguine lips as they have never been kissed before. And I will go and tell my father everything, and take you with me so that when he sees you he will realize what you are, and rejoice for the sake of his son. And I will write to Lionel, and tell him that I love you, and that you love me. For you do love me, don't you?"

She nodded her head, and sighed.

"Your eyes are like the breast of the little wild gray wood dove," he murmured,

"Darling W-Willum," he heard her whisper as though from her breast.

“And you must write to Lionel, too, because you promised. It will hurt him, but it will be honest”—and he thought, what will he do, for she is of women the most lovely!—“And my love shall guard you till that time when you will be free to come to me without fret or remorse. I will go to-morrow and tell my father and then to London and work for you!”

“Kiss me,” she murmured.

“Not now, Eve.”

“Have you forgotten how soft my lips are?”

“Be patient, Eve.”

“I am young, Billy, and I am just a woman like any other who has youth. I cannot help wanting to be loved, especially by you, Billy.”

“Let us wait in loving trust, dearest Eve.”

“I want our love now.”

He turned from her roughly, and she said,

“Billy, don’t think too much about ethics. You are fighting against God, or trying to! Who is being conventional now?”

“I am thinking of you, Eve, and also of Lionel.”

“And of your silly little vision.”

“No. I was trying to be unselfish. I have not made myself understood. I—I speak from my heart, and try to be less weak, for your sake, and you reply, ‘silly little vision.’ ”

“You can’t care for me very much if you prefer your principles—which, apparently, you have just made for yourself since you came into this room—if you prefer your principles to my kisses. For that is what you really mean. You have a tremendous desire to reform me, I know, and I suppose it is a very worthy one, but I think that if you would realize that a woman is *a woman*, and not a Francis Thompson’s dream or a

Swinburne's Dolores, you would be nearer to universal truth. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but so many men have tried to improve my third-rate brain with their first-class minds that my poor head can't hold any more!"

He made no reply.

"Well, Billy, are you going to sulk?"

He was sitting on the edge of the bed. He rose abruptly and put an arm round her shoulders, pulling her to him. The room seemed cold.

"Oh, no, you don't! Do you think you alone have feelings? You can't snub a woman when she is in tenderest mood and make her curl up with shame and then expect her to melt for you at your first regretful impulse. No, Billy!"

"I think we are looking at things from different viewpoints," he said.

"A wonderful discovery! I do feel flattered! I've been telling you the same elemental truth about man and woman ever since I met you, and you, with your wayward disregard of all other opinions except the ones you happen to hold at any particular moment, never listened! You have just discovered that B comes after A in the alphabet of love, and you impart to me your wonderful discovery—to me, who knows all the letters and their possible combinations backwards. Well, my words fall on stony ground. But I know one thing, William, and that is that when you're dead-old you will look back on your visit to Findlestone and wonder why you were such a fool as to turn your nose up at a young woman's offer. Now I'm going down by the sea to be alone. No, don't you dare to touch me! Let me pass, please! Thank you."

She went out of the flat, and he wandered into the

drawing room. From the open window he watched her running down the stone steps, and along the lamplit street to the Leas. She faded into the night, and when his straining eyes could see her no more he sprang up from the floor where he had been kneeling and followed.

He went down to the lower promenade, peering at the couples whispering under the trees. He met her almost at once, and as he had dreaded, she was with a man. He would have passed, but she said gaily,

“Hullo, Billy.”

“Good-evening, Lina,” he replied, happy in his relief that she had not snubbed him. Her companion was an old gentleman.

“Do you know my friend Captain Maddison, Sir Rudolph?” she said to him. “Billy, this is Sir Rudolph Cardew.”

With the courtly and reserved manner which for more than half a century had been part of his nature, the veteran and retired actor-manager swept off the black hat which was one of the classic sights of Finklestone and Piccadilly. Throughout the races and tribes of the world, with their varied and multitudinous head-dresses, no hat similar in height, breadth, and length was like the hat specially made for and worn by Sir Rudolph Cardew. It was a fourth-dimension hat. It was black, and at a casual glance appeared to be a bowler hat; but its crown was the shape of an acorn. Sir Rudolph's beautiful white hair was long and thick, and when both hands were not behind him as he walked with all the world for stage, one was moving an ebony stick as though it were a wand, and the other was stroking his beautiful moustache. He wore a black cape and a black-framed monocle, and spoke in the rich clear

voice of one who had known every joy and sorrow, and with a magnanimous calm was allowing life to pass him until death should come.

"How do you do, Maddison?" the old gentleman said, placing his hat on his head and confirming an imaginary spell with his stick. "The leaves are falling, pushed by the buds of a new generation. No longer are the airs of the night warm. When will come the rain, an old man wonders."

Thinking that he was asked a question, William made a hazard that the rain would come at the full of the moon; but when he realized that Sir Rudolph expected no reply to his soliloquy, he broke off in the middle of his answer.

"Mrs. d'Arcy Fairfax, I am forced to admit that what you were saying just now is, alas, true. Why, my little grand-daughter has but one idol, and who do you think that idol is? Why, Miss Mary Pickford. The buds of the new generation! Well, Mrs. d'Arcy Fairfax, although I have no wish to depreciate the kinema, may an old man who knows you be allowed to say that mildly, ah, mildly, he would deprecate the loss of a charming voice. What do you think, Maddison, of the ambition of Mrs. d'Arcy Fairfax to become an actress for the kinema?"

The old gentleman removed his monocle and swung it on its black riband; and before William could think of a suitable reply he said that he was going home up the path, and with a sweep of his original hat was gone.

"What a decent old boy," said William, walking beside her. "But are you going to be an actress for the movies?"

"No, I made it up," she replied shortly.

They walked for a quarter of a mile silently in star-

light, and then he said that he was sorry he had upset her. She took his arm, and was her dear self again.

“W-Willum, I am a beast to you. And you are so decent to me.”

In her fur coat she was so warm and luring that he swung her round and enfolded her for a kiss, but she put the back of her hand over her mouth and whispered.

“No. No. You mustn’t, W-Willum! Not here. Someone may see us. O Billy, you are naughty.”

“You are going to be my wife, dearest girl, and so why does it matter? I see things from your point of view now. I am a man and I love you: you are my mate. Somehow I felt as soon as I met you in Merlin quarry on the Corpsnout that you were the one I had always longed to meet. Dear Eveline, the longing is now stronger than ever before. I can see stars shining in your eyes.”

“W-Willum, why aren’t you always like this?”

He said nothing, but squeezed the arm he held. He thought that nowadays she was seldom like that to him; but the fault obviously lay with himself. In future he would make his dream a thing apart from the world of men and women; and even as in ecstatic happiness after so much repressed misery he resolved to make it so, he knew that the longing for the happiness of all in the world would remain with him to the end. To Eveline he said,

“I am happy because one human being seems at last to understand me.”

“Not because Eve is with you?”

“Because Eve is with me in spirit I am free as the wind to-night—the wind that passes not the humblest leaf in scorn.”

She said, to punish him a little more,
“Poof, your mouldy old spirit. Still harping on that string? I’m going home. Nighty-night, Weary Willie!”

He was left alone. He wandered on the deserted path and sat down on the steps of the seawall. He leaned against the stone pillar, and the wind bore him away, so that he was a boy again, speaking to the brook his thin legs had so often leapt. The sun sparkle was there as of old; soon would come the swallows, the darling swallows, to change it into song. Under the current waved the green water grasses, the reeds swayed to the wind. A kingfisher passed over the shining stream; a silver dace leapt for a fly. On the hawthorns the buds were opening; chaffinches were singing in every bush. Borne on the south wind the bees hummed to the woodland bluebells. The faithful English spring! Faithful to bring the early speedwell beside the cart-track, faithful to lead the windflower through the dead leaves, and the green woodpecker laughing in the glade. The country was faithful and unchanging; never would it betray the dreams it gave.

The stone of the pillar was cold and rough to his cheek; the wind made ragged his hair as he stared over the sea. He thought of the loved nightingale in the April woods; star-breath was in their voices, and listening, he might keep dream-tryst with an Eve freed and joyous. He wonder if his friend Jack, dead in the war, was near him in the wind. Or his unknown mother, who had given life, and fled from the world. The night wind passed him, cold in its embrace, pure in its caress, and bore away his sighing.

He met Eveline on the Leas. She was sitting on a seat, hatless, her hands in the pockets of her fur coat.

He deliberately made his tone gay, and asked her why she had run away from him. She shrugged her shoulders, and said she was cold, and was going home.

He walked beside her, putting his hand in her pocket and holding her fingers. She responded to him, and their fingers interlocked. Outside the flat he was about to stop, but she held on to his hand and said with a firmness that thrilled him,

“No, I shall not let you go this time.”

He felt small, and yielded to her cherishing will. They walked up the stairs, finding the light burning in the kitchen, and old Martha with crossed arms and forward head dozing on the hard chair. “Oh, Marty, you poor dear, go to bed,” said Eveline, kissing her, but she insisted on making them coffee, and serving it to them in the drawing room. Wearily she set down the tray, and wearily went upstairs.

“Now, I must go, too,” he said, rising when the coffee was finished.

“No, you mustn’t,” she replied, looking at him with bright eyes.

“But I can’t sleep here,” he replied, in confusion and shy of her.

“Are you tired?” she asked, holding her face near him, and putting her arms round his chest. “Poor Billy, I have worn you. I am a destructive force of life, the life that I so love. I realized it to-night, when you were striving to please me. Billy, you touched my heart.”

She heard his quieted sigh.

“I know why you sighed. Because your heart is touched all the time on my behalf and for others; and mine is too shallow to bear much stronger.”

The adorable head was bowed before him, and wistfully she said,

“Just do one thing more to please me?”

“Only one thing more, Eve?”

“Only one. I want you to come on the roof with me, under the same stars that we saw in Devon.”

“Not the same, Eve. They were summer stars.”

He carried up a lion's skin and some rugs, and they climbed through the window. On the dewy roof she spread it, telling him to lie down and to take off his shoes. She tucked a rug round him.

“You are my little boy to-night, Willum.”

She took off her own shoes and lay next to him, wrapping a rug about herself and throwing a loose one over them both and drawing it up to their chins.

He lay very still. In the west a half moon was sinking into a battlement of chimney pots, black against the sky. Her hands sought his, and held.

“Are you cold, Li'l W-Willum?”

“No.”

She asked no other questions. He stirred unrestfully, and she asked him to have her fur coat for pillow. He said hoarsely,

“No, not that inanimate coat. But I will have your hair for a pillow.”

She pulled the hem of his rug from under her side of him, and snuggled under it. He turned and unbound her hair, running it through his fingers trembling in ecstasy. He was intensely conscious of its feminine softness. He bound his eyes with it, seeing in a misty net the stars that seemed to be watching him steadfastly. The peculiar fragrance of the tangled tresses gave him a sensation of drawing down star-breath for his mortal breathing. The cold cheeks were near his

own that burned as with fever, and he turned to her, hiding his head on her bosom, feeling weariness and doubt slipping away, and felicity soothing him. He lay with his brow against her throat, wondering if he could keep back the surrendering words of love that sought to pour themselves from his lips. He felt that his former longing for her was only a shadow of his feeling now. He smothered his face in her hair, turning away from the stars, and put his arms round her, murmuring with hot breath against her chin.

"Care for me for ever and ever. I have no refuge, no harbour. Hold me in your arms, and protect me. Wound me no more, or I shall die. Say that you love me, darling Eve. I feel as though the sky were pressing on my brain. Pity me. I can't bear any more suspense—really I am very weak, not strong like you."

She held him close as though he were a small child that needed love and sleep in warm arms to soothe away fear-of-loss and night-fret.

"Let me love you," he whispered.

"My love is worthless, Willie dear," she said gently. "Just lie quiet, and rest your poor brain."

He lay in her arms, then struggled free to kiss her throat and mouth, while feebly she strove to hide her face, but she was leashed by her tresses.

"Nevermore to hear your voice, to feel you near me, to touch your lips: I cannot bear it," he groaned. She began to weep, and he leaned over her, kissing the tears with his hot dry lips, beseeching her love.

"Billy, I'm not worthy of your love; really I'm not."

"Kiss me, Eve."

"I believe that is all you care about me."

"I love you, Eve."

"You say so, but how can you, knowing all about

me? Yet I am young, and have learned a lot the last few months."

He was masterful. She suddenly relaxed, she yielded.

"No," she breathed, "I'm frightened."

"I'm not."

"Of course *you're* not frightened!"

"Then why should you be?"

"Oh, you infant! Billy, darling, supposing, supposing——"

She whispered in his ear, and he said, "What makes you afraid makes me happy, happy, happy! I shall write and tell Lionel I love you to-morrow when I go back home. O Eve, I do love you so."

"Tell me how much," she breathed.

"I love all beautiful things, and best of all I love you," he murmured.

"W-Willum," her voice seemed to throb, as the gold moon sank below the black battlements of the chimney pots.

When he awoke, his spirit was tranquil as the stars paling in the heavens. Eastwards over the houses the sky was touched with rosewater, for the first brush of the sun curving over the world was washing from the sky the stains of night.

CHAPTER IV

THE VISIT TO ROOKHURST

HE did not telegraph to his father when the next morning he set out by rail to Rookhurst in order to tell him that the most important thing in life, the finding of his life's partner, was accomplished. On arrival at his home many hours later he found only Biddy there. When the foster-mother's joyous surprise was over, he was able to learn that his father was fishing in the longpond. This surprised him, and he walked along recollected footpaths by hedges and across fields till he came to the gentle slope that went down to the beechwood on the other side.

Once it had been a forest; rooks had many colonies there, and in past autumns their black cawing arose with the jactitating cries of daws and the clatter of pigeon wings in the branches. The forest had gone, the long three miles of it, except for thin and scattered boles of immature growth. Nowhere could he hear a rook. They were gone, too, and in their place were white and cracked chips of wood and round sawn tree-stumps, everywhere dulled by weather. As he went along a wheelbroken path, of yore so thickly mossed and a crackle with mast, he passed a shed of corrugated iron and concrete, with locked doors, and peering in one of the windows he saw the gas-engines that had driven the circular saws. Quickly he walked on, closing

his memory, forcing himself to believe that he did not care.

Around the lake the timber had not been thrown. Alders and willows, hawthorns and oaks, elderberries and ash-trees, these remained as before. He walked along the shore and on the dry path under firs and elm-trees, searching for his father. By the tumbling boathouse he found him, sitting against a tree in the shade, reading. A long and warped bamboo rod was fixed on the bank in rests cut from a hazel. Billjohn growled, the angler looked up, put down the book after carefully noting the page and closing it, and stood up. Father and son smiled.

Externally Mr. Maddison had not changed much during the war. He was still tall and lean, wearing a tweed suit that had been turned, the trousers rolled up twice, so that the tops of his heavy shooting boots were seen. He wore a fisherman's tweed hat that had been his father's, yet it seemed no older than the rod or the book. The gold watch-chain still hung in his waistcoat; his eyes were clear and deep below the lined brow; but more grey showed in his beard.

"Well, Willie."

"Good-morning, Father."

"This is most unexpected."

"Yes."

The conversation paused. The son looked at the float among the waterlily leaves ten yards from the bank, immobile in the calm water, of blue-painted cork and slender swanquill. He recognised it as one made by himself.

"I borrowed your rod and tackle," said the father; "I hope you don't mind." He began to speak to Billjohn, and to fondle him.

"Rather not. Have you caught anything?"

"Only a couple of roach. I'm trying for carp."

"It's very hard to get them. But this is a good place."

"I remember my brother Dick caught one here once. Six pounds. I've got on a broad bean."

"A blackberry might be useful at this time of the year."

"Yes, I thought of that."

"Have you put down ground bait?"

"Yes, two days ago."

They watched the float for a minute, while Mr. Maddison filled a pipe. Afterwards he offered his pouch to his son, who thanked him and packed his own charred and chipped briar. Blue skeins of smoke drifted from them, and between puffs the father asked the son how long he had been in Rookhurst.

"About an hour. I came by a slow train—awful—stopped at every station."

"I expect you are tired."

"No."

"Is that your spaniel? He is a well-bred dog."

"Yes, that's Billjohn."

"He's like old Fidelis, somewhat. Your mother's dog. But I suppose you don't remember him."

"Yes, I do. He died when you—when I——"

"Yes, he's been dead a long time, poor old Fidelis. I've always intended getting another, but somehow I haven't. Yes. Yes, that's a fine dog. Intelligent. Is he broken into field work?"

"A little, a very little. You can have him."

"But he's yours; you mustn't give away your dog."

"But I'd like you to have him. He'd be happier here."

"Aren't you stopping very long?"

"Well, Father, I came really for the day, just to see how you were, you know, and also to have a talk with you about something. That is, if it wouldn't bore you, but I would like your advice, that is, if you would give it." He spoke nervously, and watched the float, which never moved.

Mr. Maddison said simply,

"I should only be too glad to help you in any way I could."

"Thank you, Father. The wagtails seem happy, don't they?"

In twos and threes they were passing over the water, dipping their breasts with the faintest splash and making a sunny flicker of ripples. Sometimes one would perch on a broad leaf of the waterlily, to take a gnat or fly. Waterfowl lay in the middle of the broad mere, near Heron's Plume Island; they were asleep and silent. A pigeon from the opposite shore flew towards them, but suddenly alarmed, it clapped its wings over its head like the snap of seasoned sticks and clattered off.

"Yes, they love the water. I often come here to watch them." The water was low, and greenish-white vegetation hung dry in the lower branches of the waterside trees.

"How is Colonel Tetley, father?"

"Not very well, poor old chap. He had a stroke in the spring. Old Bob died only last month. You remember him, of course."

"Oh, Father!"

"He was found in the rearing field, sitting on his log."

"Old Bob?"

"Yes. I suppose you've been to Skirr Farm. and heard the glad news?"

"No, I came straight here to find you, Father."

"They've got a baby boy."

"Who? Mrs. Temperley. How awfully splendid!"

"I'm his godfather," confessed Mr. Maddison. "His name is John William—after their fallen son, and yourself. So you see you will have a great responsibility. Mr. Temperley bought a paraffin motor-plough on the strength of it."

"I must go and see them. I am so very glad—there will be a Temperley to farm the Big Wheatfield." He added as an afterthought, "But he won't climb the Rookery. Father, it seems so strange without our beeches."

He replied that everyone lamented the deforestation.

"I used to talk to some of the Canadian lumbermen who came over specially to fell trees. They were splendid fellows. A pity, but it had to be; everybody had to give during the war. I know it's natural to think of the past and to feel that the present can never hold such happiness. Yet it is the present that is reality."

"Yes, I know."

"What is your trouble, Willie?"

"Oh, nothing much, father. I'll tell you later. It's such an awfully long story, and I hardly know where to begin."

"Have you known her very long?"

"Who?" stammered William.

"The girl you are going to tell me about. What is the matter? Does her mother regard you as totally ineligible?"

"I haven't seen her mother yet."

Mr. Maddison replied by a laconic "Oh," and played with Billjohn.

"Is she fond of the spaniel?"

"Of Billjohn? Oh, very fond, father."

"Is she? Now, I rather suspect that a roach is nibbling that broad bean. I shall reel-in, I think, and try another bait."

"I expect they will be near the surface, father. It's a good plan to throw a branding worm, fly-fashion, so that it dangles over a lily leaf. Father, she is the sweetest woman in the world." He looked on the ground, and nervously kicked over a tin of bread paste.

"Would you mind kicking this box of broad beans instead?" asked Mr. Maddison, meaning to be humorous. "I haven't yet tried the bread paste. Although I don't suppose it will be much good. They're not going to bite, that's what's the matter. So she is not bad-tempered, you say?"

The son took out an envelope, and impulsively thrust forward a photograph from it, saying casually,

"Well, you can see for yourself."

"Just a minute; I think I've got a bite."

He struck with the top of the rod, and pulled out a piece of waterweed hanging to the hook.

"As I thought, those roach have been nibbling. Just a minute. I'll reel-in. I've got deer-fat rubbed on the line to make it float. It keeps it dry, too. Now may I see the goddess?"

"Here's another one, Father. Taken on horseback. She is a splendid horsewoman."

"Yes, she certainly looks very pretty. That's a nice animal, too. Good shoulder, plenty of bone. Is it hers?"

"No, it was lent by a friend."

"I see. Yes, I can see her face better in this other photo. She certainly is a beauty, but photographs can be so deceptive. Is she coming to Rookhurst?"

"Oh, no' Father," said William in alarm: "she's in Findlestone."

"You met her with your friends there, I suppose. But, Willie, I don't want to interfere in any way, because you are a man now with your own life before you; yet I feel I ought to say that you should not think of marriage until you are assured of enough money to keep a wife. Unless, of course, the lady is wealthy, and you are prepared to sink your ordinary feelings of manhood and live on her money. It's very often done, I believe."

"I don't think she's got any money of her own, Father."

"So much the better, my boy. You will be able to feel later on that you have worked for her. I'm talking too much. Perhaps you've come to have a yarn with me about getting a job?"

"Yes, I have, Father, among other things."

"I'm jolly pleased, Willie. Often I have felt that I have been—well, too, too, well—that in my hope for you to do well in life I have been over-anxious. Because I'm a failure myself, I suppose." Mr. Maddison commenced to knock out from his pipe the tobacco that he had recently lighted; and, having tapped it out, he continued to rap the bowl on his heel, so that his voice came from an averted head. "Old chap, you've done so splendidly during the war, and I realized when you were fighting, and I was digging potatoes, that I—well, that you—I mean, that we'd gone a bit too far apart, and that it was my fault for not having understood you. I don't know."

"It was my fault, Father; really it was. I never told you anything, because I daren't, being too much of a coward. Aren't you going to fish any more?"

"I don't think so. The water is too bright, and too low. Well, I'm very pleased to see you again, Willie. What's it like in Findlestone?"

"Awfully hot."

"But I suppose you don't notice the weather very much, do you? Bathe a lot, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Well, one is only young once. We'll talk about the future another time, shall we?"

"Thank you, Father," said William, relieved.

After lunch he tried to make himself tell his father that Eveline was already married. During the meal Mr. Maddison had asked the name of his ladylove, and on being told that it was Fairfax he had concluded that she was a relative of "his friends," but William had replied nothing. So afterwards he said he would go for a stroll, which consisted of a walk to the Normans' as quickly as he could step.

He arrived hot, and found Mrs. Norman alone. After greeting him, she asked if he were coming home for good.

"No, only for a few days," he answered.

"And then are you going back to Findlestone?"

"Yes, Mrs. Norman."

"Well, you ought not to. Mrs. Fairfax will do you no good at all. She is a—a bad woman!"

Her face went pale as she spoke, and she avoided looking at him. He rose from his chair, passed his hand across his head several times, and when he could master his voice he said quietly,

"She is a lady, Mrs. Norman, who is going to be my wife. Will you listen to me, please?"

"Certainly, Willie. But I really don't think that talking will make any difference."

Briefly he told her about Devon, ceasing when Mrs. Norman laughed sceptically, and feeling rage: his rage passed, leaving a cold dislike.

"Forgive my laughter, Willie, but it is so comical."

He replied, "What makes you laugh, Mrs. Norman, is agony to others. And surely laughter and scorn have no place in the intimate confidences between friends?"

"Well, you never had a sense of humour. But I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelings; but, my dear boy, do consider, how can you marry that woman? Is her husband dead?"

"No, Mrs. Norman, but we love each other, and he must divorce her."

"That is not very easy, I can assure you. Is he willing to divorce her?"

He could reply nothing.

"Willie, you will mess up your life, or rather, Mrs. Fairfax will do it for you. But it is to be expected of one of peasant blood."

"What do you mean?"

"Mrs. Fairfax was born in a cottage at Snedlebarum, four miles away, my dear Willie. Her real name is Eve or Evie, as she was called, and her mother's name is, or was before she died, Caw—one of the Caws of Snedlebarum—an idle, vicious lot. She has no—er—father; at least, he was not married to her mother. That, in brief, is the origin of Mrs. d'Arcy Fairfax. But, of course, she has told you already?"

He did not answer.

“Harry will be in shortly, so you can talk to him,” said Mrs. Norman; “you will probably think him more sympathetic than I am, but he can’t desire you to be happy more than I do. And I’ve told you the plain truth. I say nothing about your relations with the husband, although you assured me on more than one occasion that he was one of your best friends. Willie, Willie, why don’t you go straight?”

And having made this appeal she left him alone. He went into the garden, and lay in the hammock, in the shade of the walnut tree. He had a desire to rush out of the house, and go immediately back to Findlestone. With the desire came a feeling of ravagement, and a wild mood of hopelessness, a wishing for oblivion. He lay still, feeling weak with nervous fatigue, insisting to himself that nothing should turn him aside from the protection of his beloved by a union with himself.

“Except death,” he muttered to the sky up through the leaves, “and love is stronger than death.”

When Mr. Norman came briskly to him, the desire to rush back immediately to Findlestone was gone. The kindly eyes of the artist soothed the fever of thought-laceration within him. For nearly twenty minutes he talked to Mr. Norman, telling him of the meeting in Devon, of Major Fairfax, of what Eveline had said to him. But of other men he said nothing. When he had finished, Mr. Norman leaned forward and spoke in a confidential voice.

“Well, old fellow, so you’re in love with my little model, are you? I don’t wonder, and I don’t doubt—you, I mean. Otherwise, to be quite frank, I do not feel like congratulating you.”

“But, on my honour, I love her with all my heart and soul. And she loves me, too.”

“With her heart, that organ for pumping blood and nourishing the nerves that control the emotions, yes. But not her soul, Willie. She has none.”

“But she has,” cried William: “she is a poet. Some of the things she has said to me! And her profound feelings, her sensitiveness to beauty. I can talk to you, because you will not think I’m insane or merely a libertine. You have seen her eyes—can’t you see her soul in them?”

“Now, listen to me, Willie. That soul-in-eye business is all rot. I have known Eve since she ran about in the fields in rags. I have seen her weeping over a swelled frog that some boy had stoned in the stream. Later, I have watched her taking her father’s dinner to the mowing meadow, and I have seen the men stare at her, even when she was twelve years old. When she was fourteen, she got a job as under-kitchenmaid at d’Essantville Castle—for a short time only.”

William groaned, thinking of Lord Spreycombe.

Mr. Norman continued in a reflective voice—“She is a natural lady. She was a refined child. Mother a drinker, a husband-beating scold. Father a poacher. Where she gets it from I don’t know. It’s simply a genius for assimilation.”

“There is sunlight in her,” exclaimed William.

“Well, yes, sunlight is one of the life-forces, and there is more in her than there is in the ordinary mortal. I don’t mean that she is over-sexed. But when you spoke just now about her being a poet, I know that you are a poet. She is an absorbent mirror, in which you see your own abstractions; I do not mean she is deliberately insincere. Many people think she poses—my wife thinks so. But I don’t. I know she calls up the deepest part of a man’s nature, absorbs

it, and is himself for awhile. She is quite sincere—to herself. Of course you think you love her. I knew it when I saw you. But you won't always love her, Willie."

"I will," he protested. "I cannot help myself. Nowhere can I find anyone who makes me feel so secure and rested from thought and fatigue."

"That is not a cry for woman's love, Willie. It is the child in you crying for mother-love. Poor old chap, you never had a mother, did you?"

"But, Mr. Norman, I am so sure of her. She is really sincere."

"Of course, you think she is. Any young man would, and the more sincere he was himself the more he would believe in her love. Old fellow, you must accept what I say. It's hard, I know. I believe you begin to realize the truth of my words even now. Perhaps they come at a time when your yourself are doubtful? You look a bit haggard, Willie, and it isn't because of the heat. Tear yourself away; force yourself to accept the inevitable. And yet, I know even as I speak that you cannot. You are like a man bound and helpless. Now, tell me—of course you are lovers?"

"Not since Major Fairfax became my friend."

William found it impossible to tell him about the night before last, as the feeling of holiness forbade.

"Honestly?"

"Yes, Mr. Norman."

"I find it hard to believe, Willie. And yet, no, damn it, I do believe you. But tell me—was it her doing?—but it must have been!"

"Well, you see," stammered William, ashamed, "Lionel said to her—I—I mean to me—and, I kept the promise—until the other night——"

Mr. Norman said, "Well, don't be ashamed. This happens to most young men. Willie, old boy, don't go back! Chuck her!"

"No," groaned the youth in the hammock, covering his face with his hands. "No. There is no hope for me except in her guardian love. Everything else is gone in my life. What is this countryside to me now? Mr. Norman, this is the exception. With my love she will be different. I swear to you that I am saying a truth. Fundamentally, there is good in her nature, I know."

"Willie, why did you say with your help she would be different? My dear boy, it is worse than I thought. Have you found her already with another lover? Forgive my crudity, but we understand each other."

"Men love her, curse them, but—oh, I can't even think 'of it."

"Willie, you must not shirk the truth. Don't delude yourself. There will come a time—if it hasn't come already—when you will have to realize that she is behaving to another man, to other men, as she has behaved to you."

"I can't believe it."

"You'll have to."

"Never, never, never! She *could* not be so base. I *know*, Mr. Norman, I *know*."

"Poor old Willie!" said Mr. Norman. "I can't help you. Pain will have to teach you, I'm afraid. How long are you staying here?"

"I shall go back to-night. There is a slow train at eight o'clock that gets into Findlestone at six in the morning. Every minute I spend away from her is a drawn-out agony. I am going to write to Major Fairfax immediately. I know it will hurt him, but I cannot

help it. Eve suffers as well—it is best to write. I must go home now. Forgive my rudeness. I can't stop here any longer. What is honour to me? I've never had any honour, as my school reports used to insist. I am going back to the one person who loves me, and whom I love more than my life, for she is more than my life."

Mr. Norman said reflectively, "The war has upset your normal development. It has upset hundreds of thousands, too—you and Eve among them. Some have got it worse than others. It's the beginning of spiritual awakening. A most difficult period for young people—that poor Warbeck boy, for instance, and Peter White—and you, Willie. And you are most honourable! You would never let down a friend. The French have an awfully good saying for troubles that seem about to crush one."

"What is it?" asked William, hardly knowing what he said.

"Ça passe."

At half-past six he got back to his father's house, having walked for several miles in order to exhaust himself.

"Have you had tea?" asked Mr. Maddison in the library. "Biddy made some tea-cakes for you. They're kept hot, if you want any."

"No, thank you, Father. I'm not hungry."

"You've had tea, then?"

"No, Father."

"How's that?"

"I'm not hungry, thank you, Father."

"Is there anything the matter? If I can be of any help, I will."

The son fidgeted on his chair, and mumbled that nothing in particular was the matter.

"Is it about the girl?"

He looked out of the window, unable to meet his father's grave and sympathetic gaze.

"If it's that worrying you, what can I do? Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

"Father, I find it very hard to tell you."

"I'm sorry. Don't tell me if you would rather not."

"It isn't that, Father. I'm ashamed to tell you."

Mr. Maddison waited.

"She's married, Father."

"Then she is the wife of your friend?"

"Yes."

"Well, if I were you, old chap, I shouldn't go back. It may be hard at first, but it will be best for everyone eventually."

William did not move.

"Otherwise you will find yourself involved in something that will make you not yourself."

The son made no answer, and the father began to walk about the room, as he had years ago when the son was a child, detected in some little crime, and about to be sent upstairs for a thrashing, for the ultimate good of his character.

"Willie," said Mr. Maddison, sitting down again, "has it gone very far?"

"Yes, Father."

"And does Major Fairfax know?"

"No, Father."

"He was your host, my boy."

"Yes, sir, he was!" said William harshly, rising, "and I the honoured guest in his house. Now you know what a blackguard you have for a son."

"There is no need to raise your voice like that."

"I beg your pardon, sir. I have no excuse at all for such a breach of good manners. I forgot I was a guest in your house."

"I do not forget that I am your father. And you needn't consider yourself a guest—you're the son of the house. You're a bit tired after your journey. Why not let me ring for some tea?"

"No, thank you, Father. But forgive me mentioning it, but is there any money due to me?"

"Any money due to you? From the Army, do you mean? I'm sure I don't know."

"No, I meant from my mother."

"I don't understand, Willie."

"But didn't she leave some when she—when I was born?"

"Your mother left a little money, yes, Willie. But she left it to me. She——" Mr. Maddison cleared his throat—"She did not know you."

"Oh, I beg your pardon—I rather thought, for what I remember Biddy to have said to me some years ago, that it was left to me. But I see that it was not so."

"Biddy has curious ideas at times," said Mr. Maddison, "but if I can help you at all, please let me know. Can I be of any use to you now?"

"No, thank you, Father. It is very kind of you to offer. I must go very shortly."

"But you've only just come."

"I must go back to-night, thank you, Father."

"Is it as bad as all that?" asked Mr. Maddison, endeavouring to make his son talk, and so relieve his anguished mind.

"Bad?" cried William, "so you, too, are like every-

one else. But she is not bad! It is I who am bad. I must go now."

"But won't you rest here to-night? Biddy has made up your bed."

"I should only be climbing out of the window again in the night. I did that once before, if you remember. If only I had fallen and broken my neck!"

"I don't know why you are talking like this."

"I've told you why, father. I am a blackguard. Mrs. Norman practically said so. You, I expect, think it as well. Is it a crime to fall in love? At least I have not fallen in love. Rather do I love a woman, more than my life, and for her I'd lose everything. She was born in a cottage. Mrs. Norman calls her 'that woman.' If the Galilean were alive to-day, and was born in Rookhurst in a manger, He'd be to her 'that man.' And she, mark you, is one of the chief church people in the district, and goes regularly to church, because she hasn't the slightest intuition about the nature of the visionary, of the pure spirit of the human race showing itself among men like a daffodil among grass."

"Don't distress yourself, my dear boy," said Mr. Maddison, seeing his son's face, and astonished that he had spoken in a way which he, after much meditation, understood so well.

"How can I help it? She is like someone netted in a web of her own immutable convictions. I am not intolerant of her—she is a dear woman in herself—but when I think of her, and the human race generally, absolutely helpless because people follow false ideals. The—I—we——"

"My dear boy, you are overwrought. Why not go to bed and rest?"

"There is no rest for those who fall on the thorns of life. If there be a just God, why didn't He let me be wounded and then burned alive in the scrub, instead of Jack? He was useful. I'm a waster. I must be, because I've never done anything worth while in my life, except to be a target for our own naval shells on Chunuk Bair, and later to help to destroy some poor miserable little German soldiers who were sick with yearning for peace and their wives and children. Yes, I lived in my friend's house after I had made love to her in my own. That's an awful thing to say, Father, but it's absolutely true. I'm a degenerate—as you once called me as a boy. Why don't you order me out of your house? I'm no more use to England—I made a mistake in not being killed."

"My dear boy, you must be torturing yourself to think like that. And remember, I did not demand your confidence. And I have not condemned you."

"But you think it all wrong?"

"Frankly, I cannot think it is all right. For you, I mean. But don't worry any more. You will feel better in the morning."

The tone of the father's voice, the worn look on his face, made the son remorseful for his words. He realized that he was stronger than his father, and his heart melted with tenderness for him.

"Sir," he said, in a choked voice, while tears for the way he had hurt the old man ran down his cheeks, "Sir, forgive me speaking to you like that. I'm a cad and a—a beastly rotter. But father, everything seems to be against—against me. I walk all night sometimes, to—to tire myself so that I may sleep—but it is no use—and the—the nights are long—longer than the frosty nights on Gallipoli after the deluge, when so many

were frozen on the hill. Father, the silence of the night hurts more than frozen eyeballs and the—the ice between the brain and the skull, and the—the concussion of big naval shells. So forgive me—I am—always—really—really despair, and yet, yet——”

He turned away, and went out of the room, and out of the house, and down the drive to the lane. He tried to send a telegram to Eveline to tell her that he was coming back to her, but it was too late. Just before the train moved off the gardener came to the station and gave him a note from his father. Inside the carriage he read the brief contents.

Ties that have to be broken should never be made. I don't say this on ethical or moral grounds, but because suffering is otherwise given and taken. But be true to yourself, my son. No one can do more.

CHAPTER V

BEFORE NOON

ALL night long the train moved beside starlit fields and rumbled through dark tunnels, while on the seat he drowsed and thought and smoked. He saw the dawn through the open window, cold and remote beyond the orient. In the meadows and over streams a white mist was rolled by the winds. At every station the engine stopped, while urns of milk and baskets of dairy produce were clanked and slidden into the vans. He saw the sun rise rubicund and dazed about the early autumnal vapours. When eventually the train passed down the platform of Findlestone he was chill and faint.

It was six o'clock. The newspapers had not yet arrived from London. A few farm carts rattled down the streets, with drivers sitting on shafts and tailboards. A golden September haze filled the road between the limetrees as he walked up the avenue known as The Paragon. The street door of the house was not yet unlocked so he went down to his lodgings to wash.

The young woman in black who usually gave him breakfast was raking ashes from the sitting-room grate when he entered. She said they had been worried about his absence; wisps of hair were over her face, and a sooty smudge on one cheek. He told her that he

had been away on business, and went upstairs to his room. She had cooked two rashers of bacon and a duck's egg for him when he came down, but he did not wait to eat it, and hurried to the flat.

The door was still locked, so he went for a walk on the Leas wishing that Billjohn was with him. After an impatient walk to the Majestic Hotel he returned. Milk bottles were being laid on the steps of houses. The door was unlocked, and he climbed the stairs.

A visitor had arrived before him, for he heard a cough in the drawing room. It was Peter White, dressed in flannel trousers and a sports coat of Donegal tweed. The boy turned to speak to him, but could say nothing. His submissive eyes were fixed in a dull stare as he sat on the couch.

"Hullo, Sandhurst," said William, "what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing, Captain Maddison."

He noticed that his hands were shaking.

"You don't look very well."

"I feel—I feel——"

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing, Captain Maddison."

"Have you seen Mrs. Fairfax?"

"N-no," he stuttered, "I think she's still asleep."

"Have you got more leave, Peter?"

"I'm not at Sandhurst any more. I'm stellanbosched. But I don't care, Willie. I beg your pardon."

"I like you to call me Willie."

"Mary Ogilvie always spoke of you like that, so I'm rather in the habit."

"What's that book you've got there?" asked William.

"It's for Mi—for Mrs. Fairfax. It's called *Far Away and Long Ago*. It's for her to keep."

"Why were you stellanbosched, Peter?"

"I—I couldn't stick the life. I was always ragged by the other chaps, who said I was an outsider, and because I got tight one night to forget ghastly reality they ragged my room and a cad named Formby tore up my photographs. I went for him with a poker and laid him out."

Peter White looked miserable and forlorn.

"You shouldn't drink. I saw you once before, jolly ill. You're too frail, you know. I get just the same if I drink very much."

"I'm not really frail, only I get upset, and drink's the only way to forget things."

He wondered if he in the past had been like Peter White and said to himself that he was not very different now. In spite of the boy's wretchedness, he felt impatient with him; and speculating upon the cause of this, he realized that it was because of Eveline, and his own lulled torment that drove out sympathy for others.

"When did you come, Peter?"

"Yesterday."

"Have you told your Mother? It will make her sad, Peter, and your Mother is too sweet a woman to be made sad."

Peter White gave him a timid look, and said, "How do you know about my Mother?"

"I met her at the Grand Hotel on Peace Night."

"Oh, yes, she told me she had spoken to a friend—I mean, to someone," he replied awkwardly.

"I have a high opinion of your Mother, Peter. She is a true woman."

"Yes," said Peter, avoiding the other's eyes. "Oh, I must tell you, Willie. M—Mummie is—well, I was terrified for Mrs. Fairfax to see her, because I dreaded

what she would think. Once I heard her talking about someone else, and calling her 'common.' It was like a stab to me. And when Mother came to see me once, at Sandhurst, I knew what the other fellows thought, and—and Formby said she was the fat woman out of a booth in a fair."

"Oh. And how long was the gentleman in the hospital?"

"I fought him, but he beat me easily."

"Don't worry, Peter. When our nation, with its false prides and its un-understandings, is forgotten: when our earth is ice, and the sun is vanished and black: long after when the dust of this planet has ceased to fall upon other worlds, the Love which is the spirit of the mother-heart will remain."

Tears came in Peter's eyes, and he seized the hand of William, who was gazing rapt and unseeing at something beyond the window.

They were interrupted by Martha's face solemnly ugly and expressionless looking round the door and her voice saying that Mrs. Fairfax wanted to see Captain Maddison.

"Where is she, Martha?"

"In her room, mister."

"But I can't go in there. She expects me to wait in the dining room, perhaps?" He said this because Peter White was present.

"It's all right, mister. I've took her tea in."

He went into her room, closing the door. She stretched up lace-frilled arms to him, clasping him almost fiercely. He knelt on the Persian praying rug, elbows on her pillow, forming with his hands a rest for her head. Her eyes were dewy with love, but he did not kiss her. In silence he looked at her.

"Billy, is Peter out there?"

"Yes. He wants to see you," he said.

"Tell him I cannot see him again. Get rid of him. He plagues me."

"What shall I say to him."

"Anything. I won't see him."

"Shall I give him that message?"

"No. Just say that I meant absolutely what I said yesterday. Billy, let's go and swim this morning."

He nodded, free of thought and pain, and rested his head on her shoulder. He held his cheek against hers, but spoke not the words of love that troubled his deep heart. He left her, and went back to Peter White, who was stuffing a handkerchief into his left sleeve.

"Mrs. Fairfax asked me to tell you, Peter, that she meant absolutely what she said to you yesterday."

He saw him wince and shiver, and the dull stare came back to his eyes.

"All right," he said.

Compelling his voice to be steady, thereby rendering his tone unintentionally formal and harsh, William said,

"You must remember that she is a married lady. You should not come near her again, now that she has expressly——" The speaker coughed several times, and resumed more rapidly, "—asked you not to. Is that clear?"

"Yes," replied the other, like an obedient child. "I realize that it is—it is—the end. But I don't understand." He hid his head in the couch. The elder man waited.

Peter White got up. He took an envelope from his

pocket, with a book, and held it out to William, who with back towards him did not see it.

"Willie!"

"Is that for me?"

"Yes. This, too, Willie! You do understand, don't you?"

"What, old man?"

But Peter White could only gulp. He held out the book. Overhead Jonquil could be heard jumping on her spring mattress, a thing she was most fond of doing, especially in the early morning when the sun looked in upon her through the window.

"Willie."

"Yes?"

"I didn't mean anyone to see that letter. I don't know why I wrote it. Swear you won't read it till after noon?"

"I promise," said William. "Will you be gone from Findlestone by then?"

Peter White nodded.

"Yes, by then. Tell her I shall never forget her kindness. Won't you?"

"I will."

"Willie, let me go for a walk with you. I'm so ghastly afraid of being alone. You're so strong. People say I'm weak, but they don't understand. Shake hands, will you?"

Which was done, and Peter White went out of the room. The teeth of his upper jaw, slightly prominent, were pressed on his lip. In the hall he stopped, irresolute, his eyes swelled with tears. William thought of the hare he had found in a wire on Brakspear Down, dying for air, with twisted heart.

"Won't she say good-bye?" Peter's voice trembled.

"I'll see," said William, going into the bedroom.

"Is it much I've asked you to do?" said Eveline, loudly so that Peter White should hear. "Tell him I never want to see him again. Wait. Please return this cigarette case to him. Tell him he forced it upon me, and that I never wanted it. Thank you, Billy." And, whispering to him—"Cruel to be kind."

"I'll come down with you, Peter," he murmured. At the street door Peter White begged him to meet him in the town at Corvano's at eleven o'clock.

"I'm awfully sorry, but I've got an appointment. Now, Peter, you will feel better when you're away, honestly, you will, old chap. Now, you jump on that motor-cycle of yours and go back to your mother. Won't you?"

"Won't you come with me into the town? I'm so lonely," supplicated the boy.

"I can't, really. Now, you do what I say, won't you?"

"Yes, Willie. Tell Mignon—tell her—tell her—Willie, I don't—say to her that beauty is faithfulness, and she must never forget my words."

"I will."

"And tell her not to worry."

"Very well."

"And Willie."

"Yes, Peter."

"You're the greatest gentleman I know."

He did not deliver the message at breakfast, but said, "Poor little chap! But his mother will be pleased to see him."

"I only hope he goes!"

"Your beauty is answerable for a lot of incoherence, Eve."

"I didn't make myself. I say, Bill, there's a topping show at the Leas Pavilion. A wonderful tenor. He sang the Prize Song from the Meistersingers. My dear, I did long for you to be there—I thought of you all the time. I went with de la Hay and Archie Dodder last night. Did you think of me at all?"

"Yes, Eve."

"You don't seem very pleased to see me."

He smiled sadly at her.

They saw Peter White once more, later in the morning as they were going to bathe, and Eveline ignored him. Mr. de la Hay, the actor, went in the sea about four waves after them. He attached himself with easy familiarity to Eveline, who, William observed with pain, seemed glad to see him. He felt that he was not wanted, and swam to a breakwater, but she did not seem to notice. She swam to another groin with Mr. de la Hay, and perched beside him in a harlequin bathing dress. She seemed most happy. He went out before they did, dressed quickly, and climbed a path to the bandstand. Here he remembered the letter that Peter White had given him. The clock on the bandstand pointed to five minutes to twelve, and he waited till the hour with a sensation of dread and fascination to read what was doubtless a love-letter written to the woman who loved himself.

I was a fool to show my feelings like that, he thought. And I suppose Eve will consider it puerile jealousy. And yet I don't think it is jealousy. My darling, I did so look forward to being alone with you, he sighed to himself, as he broke the envelope, and glanced at

the letter, which was written in ink on many sheets of paper, and in parts scarcely to be read. The Hungarian band, looking uncomfortable in their huzzar dolmans, and led by the longhaired violinist in Hessian boots, played the opening bars of *Belle Nuit* from Offenbach's *Contes d'Hoffmann*. It was one of the favourite airs of the Findlestone holiday crowd. He began to read.

CHAPTER VI

A DOCUMENT IN HYSTERIA

19 September, 1919.

1 o'clock in the morning.

Victoria Hotel.

So this, then, is the end . . .

The end of everything.

After two hours of silent waiting, with nerves strung up to the highest pitch, my ghastly, ghastly fears have been confirmed. Not confirmed by any actual and conclusive action, but by the feeling in my heart.

It is nearly one o'clock, I know, but I am absolutely indifferent to time or place. At the present moment I am indifferent to life itself: I am callous of the future, and as for the immediate present . . . I have not quite realized it yet. I must write—the only outlet for my terrible anguish.

How the stones on the beach outside hiss as each summer wave recedes after its crash. A bluebottle is buzzing about the room. My only dread is that it will settle on my head, and then I am sure I shall scream. My nerves have been on edge for the past two hours.

When I approached your house about a quarter past ten to-night, I noticed that your windows were not lighted up. I concluded that you were either in bed, which at that hour was unlikely, or that you were still out, which was most probable. As I paused wondering

whether I should whistle or go straight in, I heard your laughing voice in the distance. Your laugh has always appeared to me to be joyous—although as I think of it now in retrospect it grates on my ear. But that is only to be expected, perhaps, after the emotion my brain has had racing and roaring through it during the last two hours. . . .

I saw your white dress in the half-light of the evening, and with your two men friends. I immediately turned round and walked rapidly away. I bent my back as I came under the lamplight, so that you might not recognize me. I tried to hobble along as an old, old tramp might. But apparently my subterfuge was of no avail, for I heard you whistle to me—the same whistle that I taught you during the first rapture of our friendship: the whistle that I and my dear dead brother used when, so long ago now that it is a blurred and indistinct memory, we used to wander in the woods and fields in Warwickshire.

I heard the whistle. I knew that neither of the men with you would know me, or imagine that anyone was waiting for you.

I crossed the road further down, and hid myself behind one of the limetrees in the Avenue. I heard your voice distinctly: in the calm serenity of the evening it sounded so very clear: I heard you saying good-night to them, and thanking Mr. Dodder for giving you a pleasant evening. Then you ran up the steps, and the two figures vanished; the one retraced his steps, the other went round the corner towards your grandfather's house. I walked forward. I saw the light appear in your drawing room under the roof. I watched you as you drew the yellow curtains across the window, and thought at the time that, if you had wanted me, you

would have looked out to me. I am sure you knew that I was down there, watching you, waiting to come up to you. All the evening I had been glancing at my watch, counting the minutes till a quarter to ten, when I would be seeing you. How differently things turned out after all.

The sea is still murmuring: it seems to be sobbing. Perhaps it is my imagination, however, or that my grief and anguish is coming on again. Anyhow, it seems to me that it sobs as it leaves the land behind it. The fly has stopped: he is probably tired, and sleeping as he clings to the wall somewhere. . . .

I stood still on the pavement below. A Ford taxicab rushed past with blazing headlights, and its advent filled the air with a greasy odour of burnt oil and petrol, and little pieces of dust and straw whirled behind it, filling my nostrils and irritating my eyes.

Then, just as I was about to cross the road, I saw you standing at the top of the steps, and I knew you were looking for me. My heart bounded, and just as I started to come to you I saw a dark figure turn the corner rapidly, and leap up to meet you. For a moment I thought that he had been round to your grandfather's, and then I knew. Of course, it was the old trick: I had done it myself dozens of times. Your parting with the two men was just subterfuge: the elder of the two did not interest you, and, therefore, you got rid of him in that manner. All arranged beforehand as you and the other man sat alone at dinner, and you probably laughed in his face as you explained the ruse, and the blood flowed slightly faster in his veins at the thought that he, as a man, would naturally think that you were attracted by him.

For about half an hour I stood near the house,

watching the window. I am afraid I was spying again, as you call it, but I do not wish to make any excuse. But why I felt sick at heart, why my brain was numb, and I could not keep still, I cannot tell. Perhaps for the same reason that I was damp with perspiration, and my eyes misted over so that I had to rub them clear again. . . .

At the end of a quarter of an hour I suddenly thought I would see the whole thing through. I crossed the road silently, I felt like a tiger stalking in the jungle. Only, instead of the fierce joy of the chase, I experienced that sinking, sickening sensation that one has when very bad news is imminent. Yes, I was apprehensive.

I opened the hall door very silently, and crept into the hall. I paused, and listened, straining my head into the void above to try and hear your voice. I only heard the sound of plates being washed up by the people in the flat below you, and the dull murmur of their voices. I opened the door on the right, and entered the empty room, which the decorators are still working on. The light from the street lamps fell on the floor, and I could see the trees through the dirty window, and a dark patch on the glass of the middle window, where the TO LET sign was pasted on. On the floor were brooms, planks, pails of half dried white-wash, and paintpots, and the sour smell of fresh paint and putty. I glanced round and picked my way carefully over the floor to avoid kicking a pail over and betraying my whereabouts. I finally sat down on the floor opposite the door, in such a position that, with the door half closed, I could see everything that occurred outside. Then I thought that you would possibly turn the light on when you came downstairs with

him, and would see me. So I chose a position behind the door and started to wait.

Eleven o'clock struck. I could just hear what the two people in the flat above me were saying. The woman was telling the man about a young girl, a servant girl, I gathered, who had apparently thrown all maidenly reserve to the winds. As usual, they condemned her harshly. The poor girl's ears must have burned that night, because they tore every shred of character she had possessed completely in shreds. They dealt with her in the usual way the majority of women do when judging, or rather condemning, one of their own sex.

By this time I found that my knees were trembling ever so slightly. My throat was husky, but I dared not clear it, lest the noise brought people down to see who was there.

My cheeks, too, were hot; it may have been all caused through imagination, of course, but then it is very difficult to discriminate between reality and imagination. At any rate, I was very, very nervous, and very, very unhappy. But that is entirely my look-out, of course. . . . I heard the clock strike the half hour. Soon the whole house was as silent as the grave. I could hear the metallic tick of the watch on my wrist. The street lamps still threw their weird and grotesque shadow on the floor. Upstairs, in your drawing room, you were closeted with your friend, talking: I could imagine you having said to the maid, "Oh, Marty, you poor dear, go to bed!" in your gentle voice; perhaps you were being kissed by him; but, still, I must not imagine things. My thoughts are ghastly and tragic enough without imagination to intensify or distort their effect.

One sound came down from above, the sound of cups on a tray being rattled. I wondered how this occurred: did you do it as you rose to get something, or was it caused by his legs as he turned towards you to take you in his arms?

Oh, the torture of that thought! The ghastly, ghastly suspicion that it brings with it in its baleful train; the thought that your deepest words are light as the ashes of a gorse fire settling to the earth, that you give yourself as lightly as bracken to the swaling flames.

Twelve o'clock boomed from the church over the road. Midnight! But I determined to see the whole thing through. About a minute later I caught the sound of a door being opened slowly, and I heard your voice. I could not move. I stood in the doorway. I had it all mapped out, what I should do. I would almost close the door and peer through the space left. If you kissed each other . . . and I even thought he might kiss you hurriedly as a brother might . . . oh, I did not want to believe the worst . . . because I loved you with all that was best in my soul, as well as with the worst in my heart, maybe.

I saw you put the light on, and found I had slipped on to my knees, and was shaking like a leaf. But I know you must have kissed him. I will not tell you my feelings, although you will never read this letter. My feelings do not concern you at all . . . now . . . and I prefer to leave that aching, reeling feeling of sorrow undescribed, even to myself. . . .

You were not worthy of the love I had to offer you—that phrase burnt into my brain as I staggered out towards the sea—you were not worthy. You were faith-

less and insincere . . . you gave me love, and immediately you were tired. If I believed in God, I should pray for you till I died. Mignon, I cannot understand you. You did love me. In the beginning I loved you because you loved me, and told me so when you suddenly clasped me to your heart and kissed my lips that sweet morning in May down by the Rhythe Canal. You loved me then, although you hid yourself in Devon soon after, but I thought that was because of Phillip Maddison, and because you wanted to think about our love in perfect quiet. It nearly broke my heart with joy that a beautiful, poetical girl like yourself could love me. It seemed incredible that you were married. You seemed so intensely mine from the moment you came on the earth. I thought you were the one dear, sweet girl I was destined to meet when I grew up and love and cherish in my heart always . . . even after death, when we should wander together into Eternity. I have, of course, told you this before, and how you must have laughed inside you. I know you called me an egoist: I who was always marvelling at the purity of thought and feelings you called up in me and so entranced with it all that I wanted you always to hear about it: how the wind whispered it, and the birds sang it. Ah! How pitilessly I see the shattered ideal, and the feet of clay, as your statue lies in the pitiless white light of fact and reason.

I wandered down to the beach. I wanted the sea to hear my tale: the sea always soothes me so. Perhaps one of these days it will soothe me eternally as my head disappears in its swirling embrace.

The cold moon shone down on the waters, spreading a broad path of silvery spangles as the waves

tripped and rippled. Except for the sob of the waves, all was silent. The summer is finished, for this year at least. Perhaps I shall never see another. I have had my springtide of life, and now it is ended.

Twenty-four hours before—God, only twenty-four hours—you and I sat in our evening clothes on the cliffs, marvelling at the calmness of the great still sea, and I had so loved you that for the moment I imagined you as not of this earth: as some ethereal, saintly vision sitting beside me. You may remember I told you so.

Twenty-four hours ago!

Now I was sitting on the beach alone, listening to the wavelets as they sobbed up the land, and dull despair in my heart. I am afraid I still love you, but I do not trust you, and believe, in fact I know, that you are insincere, dishonourable and treacherous. And when I know all this of you, and yet still love you with my soul, I am afraid it is rather a bad outlook for me.

The night wind played around my temples, soft was the sob of the sea. I held my head in my hands, and then pressed it into the dark, wet pebbles for relief. Far away the lighthouse flashed—down the white path of the moon's radiance on the water a dark fishing boat was going home . . . the beauty of the scene for a moment enraptured my soul, and then I remembered that it was but twenty-four hours since I had known the most exquisite soul poetry with you, as we sat, clasping each other on the cliffs, I in my black coat and you in your Chinese dragon cloak . . . in the moonlight the dark shadowy pools of your eyes were radiantly beautiful . . . your face was sweet, and as the powdered silver of the moonlight drenched you, you looked like an angel . . . and that was twenty-four hours ago . . . only twenty-four hours ago . . .

Mignon! I can see no more: great big tears keep welling up in my eyes. I am utterly, utterly broken.

*Mignon, my love, light of the sky. Christ pity me!
Mignon——”*

CHAPTER VII

THE DEPARTURE OF PETER WHITE

IT sprawled across the page in wild writing. It tailed off in visible despair.

The band began to play the National Anthem just as he laid it down. He stood to attention. As soon as it was over he walked to the Victoria Hotel, which was a boarding-house near the docks, and enquired for Mr. White. The proprietress, a timid little faded gentlewoman, told him that Mr. White had just gone out on his motor-cycle. He had told her that he was departing that day, but his room was still in occupation, and he had not yet packed his bag. She asked if he were a brother of Mr. White's, because he resembled him, especially about the eyes and the mouth. He replied that he was no relative but that he was an intimate friend, upon which the proprietress confided her alarm about him. He had been out till very late the night before, or she would have said that morning, his return waking up many guests, as he ran upstairs in the dark and bumped his head into the door of a resident guest. Then he had been heard walking about in his room for more than two hours, lying on his bed, leaning out of the window, going into the bathroom and filling the basin with water, and finally leaving the house. He ate no breakfast, and had said that he would not be in to lunch. He had stayed there before, and his behaviour

had always been erratic, and he was such a charming boy at times. She feared to say that complaints had been made by the other guests, and she was afraid she would have to ask him not to return there. He had paid his bill by cheque half-an-hour since, and had gone off on his motor-cycle. He told her that his eccentric behaviour was due to disprized love, and the little lady's face showed tender compassion immediately, and she made a sympathetic movement of her lips.

When he left her he went up some stone steps to the Leas, and through a passage beside a church to the High Street. The clock over the Town Hall, facing the meeting of three streets, with the Queen's Hotel at the conjunction, pointed at three minutes to one o'clock. It was, by Greenwich time, three minutes before noon. He stood still, wondering where he might be. A motor tradevan drew up outside the principal fishshop, where a man was swabbing a marble slab with a cloth. Red lobsters and crabs, oysters and salmon, prawns and soles, lay amid blocks of ice and green parsley, with mullet and cod. His line of sight was upon the fishmonger so energetically swabbing the marble slab, but he was not seeing him, nor did he hear the metallic purr of the motorvan. I must find that poor suffering kid, he thought, now is a real chance to help someone. The fishmonger ceased to swab the marble, and the regular action being broken, William observed suddenly the peculiar and fixed expression of his face as he gazed, with the swab held motionless in his uplifted hand, at something in the street behind him. At the same moment a woman's voice began to scream, the rough shrillness continuing until broken by a sharp report and the noise of plunging hoofs. Many people seemed to be putting hands to faces, and looking down

the street, he saw Peter White behind the motorvan, hatless, and sinking to the road. A revolver loosened from his right hand as he sank down, and clattered into the gutter.

William went to him at once and knelt by him, knowing by the attitude that he might not be dead. Gleams of gold showed in the soft brown hair of the head lolling on his sleeve, and seeing the gentle eyes, no longer lit with life, and the teeth between the drooped lips, he again thought of the hare throttled in a snare. In the sunshine he kneeled, his arm under the thin neck, while the dying eyes stared into his own, as though dimly wondering who he was, and why the sun was going out.

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER NOON

A VOICE softly singing to the accompaniment of a piano sounded in the drawing room of the flat as he walked through the hall door. The wide-brimmed felt hat of Mr. de la Hay was hanging on a peg, his clouded cane and goatskin gloves laid below it on the floor. He was seated at the piano and smiled as William entered, continuing his melody:

She is waiting where the willowtree sighs

My sweet Jeannette.

The morn wind passes, the swallow dies,

By my Jeannette.

Eyes are cloud-soft, gray as the skies,

Lips are tender, good, and wise

Of my Jeanette.

Oh, this London Town's a-swoon

Every hot, vibrating noon.

I am coming very soon

To the flowery lanes of June,

And you, Jeanette.

He ceased.

“No, dear lady, I’m not sure whether I ought to finish *falsetto con pianissimo*. And to be quite honest, I’m not sure whether the words will fetch ’em. They’re

a bit too good, although I suppose I oughtn't to say that as I wrote them myself. However, if I tried to mute the poetical stop a bit, I daresay I shall make rather a hash of it, and merely fall between two stools. It wants more onions in it. But I like it. How do, Maddison, old boy."

"Well, William, now that you are here at last, we can have lunch. Do you want to wash?" she asked the man at the piano, who flashed her a smile of white teeth and said that he had already done so.

"Then come on. I suppose you can eat grouse?"

"My mouth waters, dear lady."

He leapt forward, holding the door open for her, and they went into the other room, but William remained standing by the window. Martha went in with the dishes, came out again: a masked ex-officer with a barrel organ stopped in the street below and commenced to play. A breeze came from the sea and filled the lemon curtains, and he saw it ruffle the feathers of a sparrow perched on the gutter above her bedroom window. Buoyantly on the air came a white butterfly, drifting up and down, which the bird pursued and clumsily hawked in mid air. A starling flew to the chimneystack opposite, and sang with wings shaking dull colour hues like its song. He dimly realized that he was thirsty but wanted no drink, and then Eveline with napkin in hand was looking round the door and asking if he had any reason for the display of bad manners other than a childish and backboneless jealousy.

"You make me ashamed of you," she said, "why don't you behave as an ordinary decent man? Cannot I meet an acquaintance and invite him to lunch without your insulting him in your hostess's house? Billy,

dear, why do you make things so hard for me? What have I done? Oh, you are a cruel man."

His voice made a dry whisper; he cleared his throat and she waited.

"Are you ill, Billy? Why do you stare at me like a man that has been clubbed. Tell me, old chap, are you ill?"

"I am not ill."

"Then come and have some lunch. They are such fine birds and I bought them specially for you. I told him that Naps sent them, but Naps wouldn't give anything away, not he!"

"I am not hungry."

"Thank you!"

"No lunch, thank you," he wheezed.

"Billy, are you drunk?"

He shook his head. "I—I—tell him to go soon."

"Do you order me to get rid of him?" she asked quietly, with tightening mouth.

"No, no. Oh, no."

"You make me exasperated," she said, with scorn in her voice. "Thank heaven, all men are not like you. Well, if you won't come you won't, and certainly I'm not going down on my knees to you."

"No, not to me."

She went back to the dining room. For some minutes the street musician went on grinding, but wearying of playing for nothing, he dragged his wretched organ down the road. He watched him till he disappeared round the corner into the High Street. The starling stopped its song to preen the feathers of its tail, and having done so, shook itself and flew away.

When after lunch they came back into the room for coffee, he was still by the window. Mr. de la Hay

continued to talk lively in his musical voice. He seemed perfectly at home, lying back on the couch with one leg cocked over his knee, with his effortless and bright man-of-the-world conversation suspended while he picked his teeth. William gulped down a cup of coffee; the spoon rattled in the saucer. Noting this, and his tearstained cheeks, Mr. de la Hay smoothed his nose between finger and thumb, sniffed thrice, and looked blandly and with raised eyebrows from the ceiling to Eveline.

“ . . . yes, you really must manage to come up to Town for our first night,” his voice was heard some time later. “It will be awful fun. Do you know Consuelo Fitzroy? She’s an aw-fully nice girl. Getting a hundred a week. I must introduce you, dear lady. Supper on the stage afterwards, don’t you know, and a dance. Aw-fully good fun. You really must manage to be up for it.”

“I shall,” declared Eveline.

The conversation flowed on unheard by the man at the window, except for sentences and laughs that came to him with startling distinctness, only to fade away once more and become blurred with things seen out of the window until he realized that they were going; and when alone he flung himself into a chair and covered his face with his hands. Eveline found him like this, and stood before him frowning and with pursed lips, her feet close together, and tips of spread fingers pressed against her tweed jacket.

He looked up and saw that she was frowning, but her eyes were merry. “What a conceited bore that man is! How I hate being called ‘dear lady.’ I invited him in to have a peg and a cigarette last night, after a concert at the Leas Pavilion with Archie Dod-

der, and he stayed till nearly midnight talking about himself and his rotten old show. I was quite amused, but one knows all about him after half an hour."

"You liar!" he said in a voice so harsh and terrible that she started. "You let him make love to you—you with a face that is beautiful and foul. For you keep faith with no man; your word is worthless; your mind is evil."

"I will kill you if you say any more," she said, with white lips.

"The retort of a wanton," he replied curtly.

She stood before him in cold bewilderment, a pulse beating in her throat, with opened mouth. She was nervously clenching her hands, opening them again and spreading her fingers. Slowly the blood came back into her cheeks.

"How dare you talk to me like that?" she whimpered in pain, going near to him with arm upraised to strike him, but no blow was given. "I think I shall kill you for calling me wanton. You are the same as all other men. You are! You are!—Oh, God, you are no different, after all! You called me wanton! You, the man I gave love to, for whom I broke the vows I had faithfully kept—yes, yes, yes, I tell you!—because I believed you were a messenger of the divine, whom I might serve and comfort!"

"You are a clever actress."

"O God in Heaven," she moaned, "am I really evil? O Thou who coloured my eyes and my hair and my lips for Thine own purpose, dost *Thou* say that I am foul? Thou Who made the skylark and the hawk, and put passion in the heart of woman, am I a foul thing?"

He was shocked at her frenzy of grief. She rocked to and fro on the chair in which she had flung herself. He

could look at her no longer, but sat with his hands over his face. Suddenly she ceased, and became rigid. Her face had a nobility that awed him.

"Eveline."

"Well?" she replied proudly.

"I'm sorry I called you those things."

"How dare you say you are sorry!"

"Eve, I have something to tell you."

"Once, once you said I was like a lark that sang for joy. Well, your talons have struck me down. But you won't stamp on me!"

He remembered the wounded lark he had killed in the deserted mechanics'-shed.

"I have failed you," he cried in his immense despair.

Several motorcars and taxicabs passed under the window.

"Willie."

"Yes."

"When I was fourteen I went to work as a kitchen girl in d'Essantville Castle."

He wrung his hands and said, "Yes, I know."

"Is that what you meant? Willie, I—I began to be a wanton very early, you see, although I knew as much about things then as Jonquil does now. But you don't believe that, do you? Please, will you go away, and never speak to me again? You are a gentleman, and so you will do as I ask."

"Eve, I beg your pardon," he cried, thinking that he must remain to protect her with his love against everything very soon. With his love! Had he ever loved as the common man loved, the common man of the masses he had called blind, who in millions had laid down their lives for their brothers?

She looked at him curiously, then went swiftly to

him, sobbing, and hid her head on his knees. "Oh, Willie, I have been a damn swine to you. For weeks I have deliberately tried to make you mad. Do you really think I would let de la Hay or Pat make love to me?"

She was beyond his understanding. He did not know what to answer, but stared at her dazedly.

"I don't know," he replied. "I don't know. Why shouldn't you? What has it to do with me? For I am the least of men."

He took from his pocket the letter given him that morning and handed it to her.

"What's that? Verse for my straightforward criticism?"

"Read it, Eve," he replied gently, kneeling by her and taking her hand. "Read it, and do not worry. And remember, neither that nor anything else makes any difference."

He left her, wandering about the house, and climbing on to the torrid leaden roof. He sat on the brick coping, wondering what Mr. Fairfax and the hangdog man pulling his bathchair would think if he were to cast himself down. Returning through the box-room window some time later he saw upon a tall mahogany wardrobe against the wall a green book that seemed familiar. He fetched a chair to reach it. It was *Far Away and Long Ago*, the copy given him that morning. He saw, too, the beginning of six uncompleted socks, thrown there in the past. Two were in khaki wool, and the steel needles were rusted, and all lay amid dust. The pair she had begun to knit for him was flung amongst them. Returning to the drawing room, he saw her still seated on the couch, the manuscript beside her.

"I have read it," she said, "and it makes my heart ache. Poor Peter, poor frantic little kid. I didn't know he was outside last night or I would have asked him up. Fancy him waiting there all the time. Did he give you this this morning?"

"Yes."

"Do you know, when I first met him he was half mad over another girl? And you will, perhaps, hate me for saying it, but his letter is more imagination than pain. To use a vulgar phrase, he was kidding himself when he wrote it. He is very highly strung. Half his letter is a re-hash of what he has unconsciously absorbed from magazine stories. And, Billy, he mentions hearing what the Smiths, in the flat below, were saying. They've been away for a week! The flat is empty! You see, he is at a period of life when he is neither child nor man; I used to think he was a genius unformed. O Bill, I hope I haven't done anything to harm him; but I didn't realize his awful capacity for suffering."

He put his arm round her shoulders, telling her not to fret.

"But I can't help it, Billy. Poor Peter, I wonder if he has really gone. He left his book—poor little Peter, with his talk of dreams and visions, and poetry. Just like you, only he's a babe—and you, you've grown up since you came to Findlestone. I've put his book upstairs, where it will be safe until he writes for it, as I know he will want to give it to someone else in six months' time. Oh, I know these lads and their broken hearts."

"Eve," he said hoarsely.

"What frets you now, my dear frowny-head?"

"Peter White is dead."

"Dead?" she repeated.

"He died this morning."

"But do you mean it?"

"Don't be upset, Eve. He is dead and suffers no more."

"Dead? How?"

"Ah, Eve," he whispered.

"Tell me! Why don't you tell me?"

"He shot himself."

"Shot himself? But why? Over me?"

"Don't worry, my dear. You are not to blame," his trembling voice murmured, as he tried to believe that she had never known the dead boy in love, as he held her close. But she struggled free, and he had to repeat a dozen times that he was dead, that he had shot himself, that he was a suicide, and with a cry she rushed out of the room. He heard her running down the stairs.

Imagining that she had gone round to her grandfather's house, he waited at the flat, while Jonquil showed him her latest comic paper, which contained an instalment of the adventure of her favourite heroes in fiction, a boy named Freddie Featherhair and his dog Dashatem among the savage tribes of Bohunkaboo. But his pretence of interest would not hold, so he went into the kitchen and talked with Martha. When he told her about the suicide she stood still and looked at him, while behind the thick lenses of her spectacles the tears dripped slowly from her old eyes.

"Well, mister, he was always a perfect gentleman to me. He took things too much to heart, just the same as you do. The poor dear was young, and 'ow should the young know what us old 'uns know, after suffering?"

“How life beats on us like waves on the stones, wearing them thin. Oh, Martha, I really think it is best to be out of it.”

“Don’t you think that, mister.”

The tears fell down her cheeks as she stared at him, leaning his brow against the cold distempered wall.

“You’ve had no lunch, mister. Let me give you some tomato soup, made with milk.”

“I’m not hungry, Martha.”

But she made him drink the soup, and afterwards put before him some cold game, which he could not eat; he thanked her and left the sniffing old woman.

Eveline had been round to Radnor Park Gardens, where Milly had already heard of the suicide, but she had left. Milly showed an hysteria of selfsome pity which fluttered against his brain like a moth.

“What a wicked thing to do. What a selfish thing to do. How unthinking! How sad! He was only just beginning life. That beastly man Warbeck was the real cause of it. He led him into bad habits. Oh, I don’t know how I shall ever be able to sing or play again. I used to play while that poor misguided youth sang. Some of his songs are here in this room. Think of it, in this very room! *Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal*, *Thou art risen, my Beloved*, and that shouting thing he always insisted on singing, *On with the Motley*. Poor Peter, poor silly fellow. Lina is heartbroken, dear gel. And think of the scandal. He may have left some letters to smirch the good name of Fairfax for ever. Oh, I have no patience with him. But I ought not to talk like that. And yet I can’t help it. He only thought of himself. Poor father will hear and be so upset; you know how religious he is, and—oh, dear, I hardly know what to do. I might have to go to the

inquest. And I haven't a rag to be seen in—what am I saying? Billy, old chap, tell me, what shall I do? Ought I to send his songs on at once to his father, or wait till he writes for them? What would you advise?"

"I shouldn't do anything," he answered wearily.

"Of course. How calm you are! But I feel so deeply, you know. How I envy you! So cool, calm and collected! How I manage to control myself I don't know. I wish Margy were here. Hark, what's that? Is it a policeman, do you think?"

"It sounded like the kitchen fire being made up."

"Yes, I suppose it did. I must get father's tea. Do stop, won't you?"

"I ought to find Eveline, Milly. She left the flat in great distress."

"That so good of you, if you will, old chap. Do buck her up. She must not worry. She ought to go away to avoid any scandal. She is not at all blameworthy. Find her and buck her up, old chap. Kiss me."

He kissed the fluttering woman, and left the house as Mr. Archibald Dodder, his face an agitated purple, entered the gate. "Poor fellow, awful, awful," he puffed; but William hurried away, searching for Eveline. He went on the Leas, hastening through the gay holiday folk conambulating up and down past the bandstand, looking at every face. The crowd was thin by the Grand Hotel, and he was about to turn back when an unusual figure caught his attention—an old gentleman dressed entirely in black, wearing on his snow-white hair a hat with an acorn-shaped crown. It was Sir Rudolph Cardew, the veteran actor, and he walked on the fibrous grass, swinging his monocle on its black riband, as though he were on a vast stage. William hastened to him to enquire if he had seen

Eveline, and Sir Rudolph paused, screwed the monocle into his eye, and awaiting him in an attitude of profound and courtly attention.

“How do you do, Sir Rudolph!” said William. “My name is Maddison. I met you the other night with Mrs. Fairfax.”

“Ah, yes, well do I remember our little talk by the sea, Maddison. But you are perturbed: may an old man who knows you be allowed to say that you are sadly, ah, sadly, perturbed by the rumours that surround Mrs. d’Arcy Fairfax in connection with the slain youth?”

“Yes, Sir Rudolph, I——”

“It is well for the world, Maddison, that all young men do not feel so keenly. For he has crucified himself! The suicide, the self-slain! Who shall know the thoughts of the young lover distraught! For him the world is dead. That which in the radiance of his lofty dreams is more splendid than life is lost for ever. Time does not exist for him: there is no future: he cannot look ahead. His is too fine a nature to bear the annihilation of its exalted dreams. There is no consolation for him. He has looked upon the loveliest in life, and rather than have the vision blurred, he takes it with him triumphantly to the shades of death. The lesser things of life are nothing to the aristocrat of thought. Nothing! The aristocrat of thought goes to the guillotine and the cross amid cries of ‘Craven!’ ha, and Weakness! and mocks and jeers and cries of ‘What is truth’; but because his qualities are noble words are less than shadows. Ah, Maddison, woe unto they who cannot learn to submit to life as it is: to disassociate aspiration and reality! But who am I that my musings should be of interest to anyone save an old man?”

Sir Rudolph looked earnestly into his face, and saw that his listener was profoundly affected. Accordingly he felt a liking for the young man, whose arm he held above the elbow, an honour of intimate equality he bestowed upon few men in Findlestone and Piccadilly. William walked with him as far as the bandstand, where Sir Rudolph turned with an expression of pain on his handsome face, saying that he had an ear for music. He swept off his hat and with a hand-gesture of farewell turned on his heel and sauntered back the way he had come. William went to The Paragon, but Eveline had not been back. For six hours he searched Findlestone, returning to the flat many times. Jonquil was crying for her mother and would not be comforted. Martha gave him another bowl of soup in the kitchen, and he continued the search just as the first star peered wanly above the sea.

CHAPTER IX

VESPERALE

RUMOUR leaping on plebeian tongues had already carried her name throughout Findlestone. The double news sheet, badly printed and misprinted, that called itself the *Findlestone and Rhythe Evening News* gave a column to the tragedy, hinting that startling disclosures would possibly be made at the coroner's inquest. Meanwhile it would content itself by stating that a lady locally well known would probably be called to give evidence. The deceased was alleged to be the only surviving son of Councilor G. White, C.B.E., of Birmingham, a magneto manufacturer, and was understood to be a gentleman cadet at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. He had been staying at the Victoria Hotel. There followed various interviews with various people. He stuffed the sheet into his pocket, and mingled with the crowd on the Leas.

Ahead of him the outline of the bandstand was pricked in silver: roof, spire, pillars, basement; and the promenade lights stretched from and beyond it like golden oakapples, decreasing with distance till they were no larger than yellow mothfreckles on the woad-blue foliage of night. People leaned against and sat on the wire fence at the cliff top, smoking, chatting, and observing the passersby. Below the Leas a vast

open air rink was filled with roller-skating couples, from whom were thrown ragged interblends of shadows by the four great arclamps at the corners. A rasping blare of waltz music was blown across the rink from the great trumpet of a stertorophone. The darkling sea was smooth and calm, preparing itself for another assault; small wave lines rolled on the beach, breaking in the dusk like a sweat lather on dingy horsehairs.

He hurried to the bandstand, thinking that he might find her in one of the seats. A thousand lighted faces were before him. Round the cleared space between the first rows and the stand he walked, searching, a numbness overcoming him as an intent scrutiny gave no sight of her. Back again into the gaily laughing strollers on the promenade, while the lighthouse over the sea flashed intermittently like the high-shrapnel he had watched above the Bapaume road at night; but there was no war now to which he might go and find peace. Past the dark buildings of No. 3 Rest Camp, no longer filled with soldiers returning from leave, past the bright glowing windows of the Royal Hotel, back again to the illuminated bandstand, along the tortuous way of the crowded Leas. Fruitlessly to Corvano's Café Royale, a gulp of coffee while he looked at every table, a return to the flat, to Martha sitting with folded arms in the kitchen, and to hear her dull reply—

“She hasn't been in, mister.”

At ten o'clock he heard in the distance the band playing the National Anthem, and shortly afterwards the blare of the rink stertorophone ceased, and the arc-lamps died out. He was then at the eastern end of the Leas. So fine was the night, so mothlike the moon, that the crowd remained till nearly eleven o'clock, when every other golden oakapple became black on

the invisible bough above the promenade, as though blown down by a wind that suddenly arose off the sea. In a few minutes the Leas were deserted, except for solitary male prowlers and affectionate couples. He continued his quest by the seashore, while the waves pounded the pebbles and flung afar the spray. In a lull of the wind he heard the cries of migrating lapwing; the crests of waves tarnished the silver path of the moon on the waters. He scrambled over the slimy wooden groins and on the stones that slid and jarred to his steps. He had an impulse to swim out to sea till he could swim no more; but the thought of her anguish killed it immediately. And yet had he known that the small planet called the world would flare up in space and crumble to ash that night, his despair would not have lessened; the shock of cosmic catastrophe would have seemed puny compared with the shock of realizing that beauty was false to its spirit, false to its vowed affection, to its words of love.

Onwards he trudged, the gusts flinging spray on his face, his grief seeming to find answer in the cries of the lapwing in the windy darkness above. He found her just after midnight, sitting on the beach. She did not look up; the noise of his steps was brushed away by the roar of the waves. She sat still, her head bowed and hidden, like a stone mourner gravled on a tomb. He took her hand, frigid as the pebbles on which she sat, and spoke her name. She shook her head.

"Look up, Eveline," he said, touching the cold cheek.

She turned a face white with moonlight and looked at him, asking tonelessly,

"Why do you come near me?"

"I have been looking for you everywhere."

"Why?"

"Because I love you," he answered.

"You love me. Don't you realize what I am?"

The tone was so flat and dull that he could not answer. He thought of her as a bright-eyed child taking her father his lunch under the hedge, while the youths followed the little girl with their eyes. Men would always pursue her, because she was beautiful, and beauty was only the serf of God.

"Willie."

"Yes, dearest Eve?"

"I have been thinking that you are very much like Someone who said that it were better for a millstone—you know, rather than do harm to a child. Oh, if only the peasant girl had never left the fields. I learned too early that life was hard and that men were—were—I became arrogant when I realized that I could make men do as I pleased. And now there is a boy who had died for love of me—an unsoiled, gentle boy. I am evil!" she wept, clutching his coat.

"You poor little straying thing," he whispered, kneeling and taking her in his arms. "Lean that restless head against my heart, and repine no more." He murmured comfort into the chilled ears, while looking up at the stars and caressing with his hand the uneasy head that would find no rest till joy and sorrow were one with death. He felt his heart grow as strong as the earth, and was filled with pity for her, for all human failure; and sadness grew with pity.

She spoke his name, and he leaned over to hear the small voice.

"What worries you now, dearest Eve?"

"I did let him love me."

He leaned lower, pressing her hair with his closed eyes.

“Only once. I didn’t mean to. When he came in such distress into my room one morning after—after wandering about all night, and I was drowsy, I had a terrible and sudden compassion for him in my breast, which changed into—into—I wanted to console him, and there was only one way I knew.”

“I understand, dear one.”

Listening to the sea he thought of another lying there who in the surge of the past night had heard only a wave-chant of lamentation and despair. A solitary lapwing cried through the dark to the flock it had lost, and the pines on the cliff behind made a wild æolian music as they told of the rain that surely would come with the western wind to heal a land’s disverdure.

“Look up at the stars, which have rolled away so much sorrow and hate, and lift your heart to that which set them crushing the gold of pity . . . out of darkness.”

The unheard words were torn out of his mouth by the wind and drowned in the toppling crash of the combers. He spoke not to her, but to the void above and beyond the moving waters. Her head lay against his heart so acquainted with grief, and she seemed to have fallen asleep with quiet breathing, but wide-eyed he sat there.

The stars on the southern horizon became ruddy in the seaborne vapours, and he watched till they dipped beyond the world. The wind rushed on.

VALEDICTION

THE landlady was raking the grate when he returned to his lodging. She made a remark identical with the one she had made to him twenty-four hours previously. He said that he did not want any food, and stumbled upstairs to his room, kicking off shoes and getting into bed.

When he awoke it was dark, and mist was over the moon. Groping for the jug, he drank some water, and went to sleep again, waking into daylight. He shaved and washed, went down to breakfast, and was told that it was three o'clock in the afternoon.

"Us didn't call you, because us thought you was tired out."

"How long have I been asleep?"

"Since yesterday morning, sir. Shall us get you some tea?"

"Not now, thank you. I must go out."

He returned soon afterwards, packed his bag, paid his account and departed, in his sadness unable to give any reply save a nod of the head to the landlady's hope that her lodgings and attendance had been satisfactory. At the station he found he had half an hour to wait for the London train. Immediately he hurried to The Paragon.

Jonquil was before the house when he arrived there the second time, stooping over a drain, a string held in her hand. She was bareheaded, dressed in a corduroy

jacket and lemon socks with brown shoes. She glanced up at him and smiled.

“Quillie’s fishing, Willum, like your father were, with a bean.”

He looked towards the Leas, and then down the avenue of limes. “Did mother go out again, Quillie?” he asked.

“Er-hum. I say, Willum, do you think I’ll catch a fish. Quillie were fishing here yesterday, but didn’t c-catch one. Quillie’s glad you comed to see her. You can hold the line if you like!”

He did not answer her. She looked at his face, and saw that he was strange.

“W-W-Willum, what’s the matter?”

“Nothing.” Then,

“Was mother with anyone?”

“Er-hum. With Naps.”

“With Naps, Quillie?” he asked slowly.

“Y-yes, Willum. Mummie was crying, and started to go to the trains by herself, but—but Naps comed in his moticar. O Willum, dear, why do you look like that?”

She put her arms round his knees, and stared distressfully up at him. He bent down and kissed the little face. The love of the linnet-frail girl gave him a poignant longing to fade with her into the sun. How well could he understand now one of the most homeless of poets, whose tiercel spirit for so long having ranged unmated the starry wilderness, evermore was haggard of human love!

“Beauty is faithfulness, Quillie.”

From the mortal world of banished hopes his dream flew up in the blue-stained air, a White Bird that all men should see, and seeing, be comforted. Truth for

the world would he seek to his life's end. If heart cried its pain, heart should burn at its own stake till all were faithful dust!

"Willum, you're not proposen to leave Mummie, are you? Don't go."

He looked down on the pavement worn by the feet of men, and thought of Eve, and anguish wrapped his heart in flames.

"I must, Quillie."

"No, you mustn't, Willum. Mummie loves you so dearly. Honest to God, she does. And so do I, Willum. And Marty, and I believe Daddy does as well——" She threw away her fishing line.

"Why are you so strange and—and your eyes so big and staring?"

"O Quillie, love the swallows and the flowers all your life. They will make you so happy. And, though they die, others will come. Like the lightbringers among men, Quillie."

"What do that mean? Where are you off to poor Willum?"

He looked at a rain cloud travelling from the west, fraught with colour stolen from the sun.

"Please answer, Willum. To find Mummie? Or going away for ever?"

He made his answer steady, but it was very low.

"I'm going for ever, Quillie."

"W-W-Willum——"

And kissing her on the brow, he turned away, leaving the little child sobbing on the curbstone, her arm over her eyes.

*London—Devon,
November, 1919—November, 1923.*

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